

**RESPONSES TO REPORTED ACTS OF BULLYING: A CASE STUDY OF
EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA HIGH SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS**

by

Mark N. Covelle

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Field of Educational Leadership and Management

at

Drexel University

August 3, 2016

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Abstract

RESPONSES TO REPORTED ACTS OF BULLYING: A CASE STUDY OF EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA HIGH SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Mark N. Covelle

Drexel University, 2016

Chairperson: Kenneth J. Mawritz, Ph.D.

Administrators face a myriad of social and disciplinary issues in the course of their work; however, the topic of bullying has emerged as a matter of national concern and a complicated matter for school officials. Definitions of bullying vary from state to state as do requirements for addressing reported acts of bullying. The purpose of this study was to examine how administrators, tasked with maintaining rules and discipline in the school building, investigated reported acts of bullying and issued consequences for confirmed acts of bullying in traditional high schools. This case study used two qualitative methodologies, a structured interview and a document analysis, to create a robust understanding of the phenomenon. Additionally, this study observed the challenges administrators faced when investigating and implementing consequence for bullying. This regional case study focused on six traditional, public high schools in east central Pennsylvania via the administrative disciplinarians within each school. All of the participating school administrators share the experience of implementing school district policies on bullying as required by state law. This case study examined the wide variety

that exists within a specific geographic area in the investigation and disciplinary phases of bullying reports in each school as a way of informing practicing administrators in the field of current practices. Future research in the area of study includes the exploration of best practices for investigation and implementation of consequence and the effect of anti-bullying or school-wide positive behavior support programs in reducing bullying incidents at the high school level.

Signature Page

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Dedication Page

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Stephanie. Her constant and unwavering support not only made the work of this study possible, but also the three years of coursework that preceded it. Thank you for supporting me in this endeavor; I could not have done this without you.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my loving parents and sister. Education was the cornerstone of our home. My parents made inexpressible sacrifices to ensure that I always had access to the best possible education from elementary school through college. Those sacrifices were the driving force behind my passion in pursuing this terminal degree. Thank you for your support and constant encouragement.

Acknowledgment Page

First and foremost, I would like to thank my dissertation chairman, Dr. Ken Mawritz. Your patience, guidance, and words of wisdom were a constant throughout the attainment of the degree and the completion of this dissertation. Your experience as a school administrator added perspective and richness to the work presented here. Your belief in me and in my work from day one was palpable and much appreciated.

To my dissertation committee, Drs. Levine and McHale-Small, thank you for donating your time, experience, and wisdom to this process. Your questions, suggestions, and guidance made this a better study.

To the participants in the study, thank you for your time and your candor. Your experiences will, no doubt, have a positive impact on schools and students.

Finally, I would like to thank my classmates, colleagues, family, and friends. You were my source of inspiration throughout this process. Thank you.

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RESPONSES TO REPORTED ACTS OF BULLYING: A CASE STUDY OF EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA HIGH SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research

Introduction to the Problem

Schoolyard bullies are as old as schools themselves; in fact, there is no type of school that is immune to the prevalence of bullying behavior (Thomas, 2012). However, with the proliferation of social media and handheld technologies that allow for rapid and often anonymous communication, as well as several highly publicized bullying incidents (Alvarez, 2013; Shpigel, 2014), the topic has taken on a renewed societal importance. Many of the peer interactions that ultimately result in a bully-bullied relationship have some nexus to the school environment. As such, parents often turn to school administrators to intercede and address bullying situations.

Bullying occurs in a variety of forms (Olweus, 2013) and due to the proliferation of technology, the methods and actions associated with bullying are ever-changing. However, the definition of bullying has stayed relatively consistent since first introduced by Dan Olweus in 1973 and revised in 1988 where he stated, “[a] person is being bullied when exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions (verbal or physical) by one or more other persons, in the presence of an imbalance in the strength relations (physical or psychological) between the two” (Olweus, 1988, p. 30). Olweus is clear in emphasizing three characteristics “(1) a power differential between those who bully and those who are victimized; (2) repeated harm over time; and (3) an intention to harm” (Law, Shapka, Hymel, Olson, & Waterhouse, 2012, p. 227). The research is less

established in deciding whether these three characteristics are consistently present in cases of cyber or online bullying (Law et al., 2012).

However, due to the number of organizations that take part in advocating for the prevention of bullying, various new definitions of bullying have emerged and have contributed to confusing many stakeholders in the field of education. The federal government has created resources through www.stopbullying.gov where, in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), audiences can access resources to address bullying. The government resources use a unified bullying definition that defines the act as follows, “bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time” (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2014). In Pennsylvania, the school code regarding bullying defines the terms as follows,

‘bullying’ shall mean an intentional electronic, written, verbal or physical act, or a series of acts:

- (1) directed at another student or students;
- (2) which occurs in a school setting;
- (3) that is severe, persistent or pervasive; and
- (4) that has the effect of doing any of the following:
 - (i) substantially interfering with a student's education;
 - (ii) creating a threatening environment; or
 - (iii) substantially disrupting the orderly operation of the school

(PA 24§1303.1-A).

While the various definitions are generally aligned, colloquially, the definition of bullying has eroded to encapsulate many types of acute negative peer interactions (McNeil, 2011). The need for a consistent and uniform definition has growing support in the research community, “the inconsistent definitions used to measure bullying coupled with evidence indicating the importance of distinguishing bullying from other types of aggression between youths highlight the need for a uniform definition” (Gladden, Vivolo-Kantor, Hamburger, & Lumpkin, 2014, p. 5).

There has been an explosion of interest in studying bullying over the past 20 years (Olweus, 2013; Wang & Iannotti, 2012) and due to the rapid nature of social media and 24-hour news cycles, the topic of bullying is more prevalent than ever in both social and research circles. The increased research has revealed several troubling statistics about the prevalence of bullying. “Differences in the measurement and definition of bullying have contributed to varying estimates of its prevalence among youth. Estimates range from 13% to 75%” (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, and Hymel (2010) as cited in Gladden et al. (2014)). A 2011 report on youth risk behavior indicated that 20.1% of students reported being bullied on school property in the 12 months preceding the survey (Eaton et al., 2012) while a 2009 report found 28% of students aged 12-18 had been bullied at school through traditional, non-cyber, means (DeVoe & Bauer, 2011). DeVoe & Bauer (2011) used a very broad definition of bullying in their work which included whether a “student had made fun of them, called them names, or insulted them; spread rumors about them; threatened them with harm; pushed, shoved, tripped, or spit on them; forced them to do something they did not want to do; excluded them from activities; or destroyed their property” (p. 11). This was different from the Eaton, et al. work, possibly explaining the

difference in findings. The ongoing use of inconsistent and varied definitions to describe bullying and bullying behaviors is also noted in the work by Gladden et al. (2014).

Addressing the issue of bullying at secondary schools often falls to the disciplinarians who must investigate the reported act, confirm the veracity of the report, and issue consequence to students when appropriate. However, the facts and circumstances often lead to situations in which the term or label of bullying cannot easily be applied. This is not entirely surprising since the very definition of bullying is not consistent in research circles (Gladden et al., 2014), nor is bullying behavior easily identified by students, teachers, or parents (Mishna, 2004).

The research presented here was designed to explore administrator response to reported acts of bullying. The researcher measured the extent to which high school administrators were consistent in their response to reported acts of bullying. Resultant data are critically important in informing educational administrators as each school and district across the country works to prevent and address the bullying epidemic (Jones & Augustine, 2015).

Statement of the Problem to be Researched

It is essential to understand the manner in which high school administrators, namely principals and assistant principals, investigate and discipline acts of bullying due to their important role in establishing the climate their respective schools. The principals also have the ability to implement anti-bullying programming if they feel such a need exists in their school. The research presented here helped to identify not only the various methods by which high school administrators in the eastern Pennsylvania region

investigated reports of bullying, but also the methods by which students who engaged in acts of bullying were disciplined for such behavior.

Applicable state law (PA 24§1303.1-A) provides high school administrators with little more than a definition of what acts constitute bullying and several regulatory requirements of the local education authority. While the state law definition aids school officials in determining what constitutes an act of bullying, the law remains silent on methods for addressing such behavior deferring such decisions to local education authorities to determine. As such, the manner in which school districts across the state investigate reports of bullying and issue consequences for confirmed acts of bullying has the opportunity to be extremely varied and diverse.

Purpose and Significance of the Problem

The purpose of this research was to study the manner in which high school administrators apply the same bullying law in eastern Pennsylvania schools regarding the investigation and discipline for reported acts of bullying. The applicable state law is decidedly specific when determining what behavior constitutes bullying but noticeably silent on providing provisions for investigating reports or consequences for confirmed acts (see Appendix A). It would not be uncommon for the state to provide minimum requirements for consequences for violations of school law. For example, the law for possessing a weapon on school grounds states, "...a school district or area vocational-technical school shall expel, for a period of not less than one year, any student who is determined to have brought onto or is in possession of a weapon on any school property..." (PA 24§1317.2). With the bullying law is silent on investigating and disciplining acts covered by the legislation, it is possible that every district in the state

could address the behavior in a completely varied and unique way. Therefore, the research presented was designed to explore the different methods by which school administrators from different districts address bullying. The information will inform the field of education of current practices relative to addressing bullying in schools and the extent to which schools find their current practices to be successful. Such information stands to be a valuable component to future research about determining best practices when investigating and disciplining bullying within the high school setting.

In researching the problem presented, practitioners in educational administration will have a better understanding of their own mindsets about bullying. By having this awareness, administrators can better understand areas of their practice that need addressing and understand the perceptions of their colleagues more clearly. The research to date has addressed various areas related to bullying. These areas included the following:

- Student attitudes toward bullying (Davis & Nixon, 2011; DeVoe & Bauer, 2011; Eaton et al., 2012),
- Parental perceptions of bullying (J. R. Brown, Aalsma, & Ott, 2013; Sawyer, Mishna, Pepler, & Wiener, 2011; J. M. Walsh, 2005),
- Middle level principal perceptions of bullying (Alred, 2012; Kennedy, Russom, & Kevorkian, 2012),
- Teacher perceptions of bullying (Kennedy et al., 2012; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008; Mishna, Scarcello, Pepler, & Wiener, 2005),

- Effectiveness of bullying intervention programs (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Frisé, Hasselblad, & Holmqvist, 2012; Good, McIntosh, & Gietz, 2011),
- The different types of bullying that exist, especially cyberbullying (M. Walsh, 2012; Wang & Iannotti, 2012; Wang, Iannotti, & Luk, 2012), and
- The need for common definitions about bullying in the research field (Gladden et al., 2014; Vaillancourt et al., 2008).

Where the research was less clear is in the area of administrative responses to bullying, especially at the high school level. In researching the ways that administrators implement required anti-bullying laws, it may be possible to identify and synthesize effective practices as well as identify areas in which barriers exist to implementing anti-bullying programs.

The primary audience for this research is administrators in secondary education. This was not designed to be a comprehensive study of all levels of schooling, this research focused on the area of bullying among high school aged children. A secondary audience for this work includes those who work in the area of administrator preparation in the higher education field. This research informs those preparing individuals for administrative work in the area of bullying. The outcome of the research enables administrators to be aware of their own methods of addressing bullying in the context of what their peers in the same regional area are doing with respect to the same issue. By understanding these elements, administrators will be more informed as they approach the bullying issues that could be affecting a child's ability to be successful in the school

environment. Additionally, the outcome of the research may serve as an element in the process of updating local administrative practices and policies relative to bullying.

There are other constituencies that will have an interest in the work presented here including state departments of education, legislative bodies, school boards, central office administrators, and parents. Each of these groups has a significant and vested interest in safe and secure school environments that preserve the educational setting for all students. Departments of education, legislators, school boards, and central office administrators will be able to understand the implementation of their laws and policies as well as gathering a robust understanding of the challenges that face administrators on the front lines of bullying prevention. Such understandings could lead to the adjustment, clarification, or modification of existing school practices. Parents share a similar vested interest in school safety. The result of the work presented here will not only help parents understand the current state of bullying in American schools, but also understand the manner in which bullying incidents are investigated and disciplined. Parents can use this informed perspective to advocate for their child, share common vocabulary with administrators, and seek best possible outcomes when confronting bullying with their child.

A common understanding of bullying is critically important. In a study conducted by Vaillancourt et al. (2008), when students were furnished with a definition of bullying, the reported number of bullying acts against the student fell while self-reported incidents, where the student reported acting as a bully, increased compared to students who were not furnished a definition of bullying. The research extends beyond students awareness of bullying to parental definitions as well. Waasdorp, Bradshaw, and Duong (2011)

found that “it is critical that researchers and educators understand how parents perceive the issue of bullying and the ways in which they respond to their child’s victimization. Identifying factors that are associated with parents’ perceptions of bullying and reactions to their child’s victimization may inform the development of collaborative intervention and prevention efforts”(p. 324). Aalsma and Brown (2008) found a similar circumstance, “bullying and victimization remain difficult to define. A qualitative study of elementary school children by Mishna (Mishna, 2004; 2006) found bullying behavior was not easily identified by the victimized student, teachers, or parents” (p. 101).

However, it has been the experience of this researcher that reality mirrors the research. A study by J. R. Brown et al. (2013) found that, “[f]rom the perspective of all but one parent, school officials were perceived by parents as unable or unwilling to enforce their own school policy against bullying and therefore, provide protection” (p.507). Interestingly, all 50 of the United States have either policies, laws, or both codified to address bullying (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2015) but the laws, including the specificity used to define the act vary widely (e.g. PA 24§13-1303.1-A and CT §10-222d; see Appendices A and B. In 2008 the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania introduced legislation (PA 24§13-1303.1-A) requiring all school districts within the Commonwealth to comply with five components of the law (see Appendix A) including provisions that districts must “adopt a policy or amend its existing policy relating to bullying and incorporate the policy into the school entity's code of student conduct.” However, the legislature made limited recommendations on the contents of the policy except for stating, “The policy shall delineate disciplinary consequences for bullying and may provide for prevention, intervention and education programs, provided

that no school entity shall be required to establish a new policy under this section if one currently exists and reasonably fulfills the requirements of this section.” The law does provide a comprehensive definition of bullying which, while helpful for identifying the behavior of concern, provides no guidance to schools or victims relative to the prevention or intervention of bullying behavior. As such, the law leaves much of the decision-making relative to bullying up to local school authorities to determine. Such variety was the basis for the research questions presented here.

Research Questions

The research in this study was guided by four research questions, a central question and three sub-questions. The central question of this study was as follows: what is the administrative experience in responding to reported bullying incidents at the high school level?

The sub-questions included the following:

- What is the system utilized by high school administrators when investigating reported incidents of bullying?
- What is the system utilized by high school administrators when disciplining confirmed incidents of bullying?
- What challenges do high school administrators face when investigating and administering consequence for incidents of bullying?

The Conceptual Framework

Researcher Stance and Experiential Base

As a sitting high school administrator, the researcher has witnessed varied administrative responses to reported acts of bullying. As students advance into their high

school years and into young adulthood, they are already discovering their individuality and exercising free will in the school setting. As such, this researcher has observed administrators state that they do not believe that bullying is a significant high school issue, while others believe just the opposite. The researcher has also observed the difficulty in investigating and disciplining for bullying. It is the experience of this researcher that, anecdotally, bullying is often over-reported because the nature of the behavior does not meet the state or school district approved definitions of the behavior. However, reports of bullying often mean invoking a required investigation yielding limited results due to the difficulties stated above. When the act of bullying is considered unfounded, the reporting party often feels that the report went unheard or uninvestigated therefore feeling unsupported by the school administrators. Researching the various methods by which schools investigate and discipline for bullying highlighted similarities and differences in systems and processes and indicated areas where opportunities existed for broad improvements to the systems involved in investigating and disciplining for bullying.

Additional variances exist in the manner in which schools levy consequence for the policy violation of bullying. When an investigation yields a confirmed case of bullying, consequences for the aggressor mean the application of the label “bully.” Application of such a label is symbolic in nature, not literal. When a student has been bullied, he or she has been the subject of the act of a “bully” or “bullies.” When applying discipline to a student for a policy violation of “bullying” the administrator indicates the student was responsible for the bullying behaviors thus making him or her a “bully.” Colloquially, there are few pejorative, though symbolic, titles assigned to students that

have been disciplined with the societal weight that “bully” carries. The term “bully” has such a strongly pejorative societal connotation, that there is expected parental resistance to the application of such a label to their child. Few policy violations yield the output of a label for a student if he or she is found responsible for certain behaviors. Save for “cheater” applied to confirmed violations of academic integrity, no other school-based violation results in the application of a commonly recognized and overtly derogatory label.

The researcher also knows first hand that there are, at times, barriers to successful implementation of any variety of initiatives. Sometimes the barriers are systematic or structural while other times the barriers are environmental. The researcher feels that by allowing participants the opportunity to explain or expose difficulties they experience investigating reported act of bullying, or disciplining for confirmed acts of bullying, that the researcher will have a clear and robust view of the experience of each administrator.

The research presented here sought to understand the way in which various administrators in various school districts in eastern Pennsylvania investigated and disciplined for bullying. The work is not only timely to the field, as bullying is a topic that is exploding in mainstream media and the field of research more and more each year, but it was also relevant to the educational practitioners and participants in hopes of achieving consistent successful outcomes with bullying issues. Researching the various methods by which schools investigated and disciplined for bullying emphasized similarities and differences and indicated areas where opportunities existed for broad improvements to the process.

Conceptual Framework

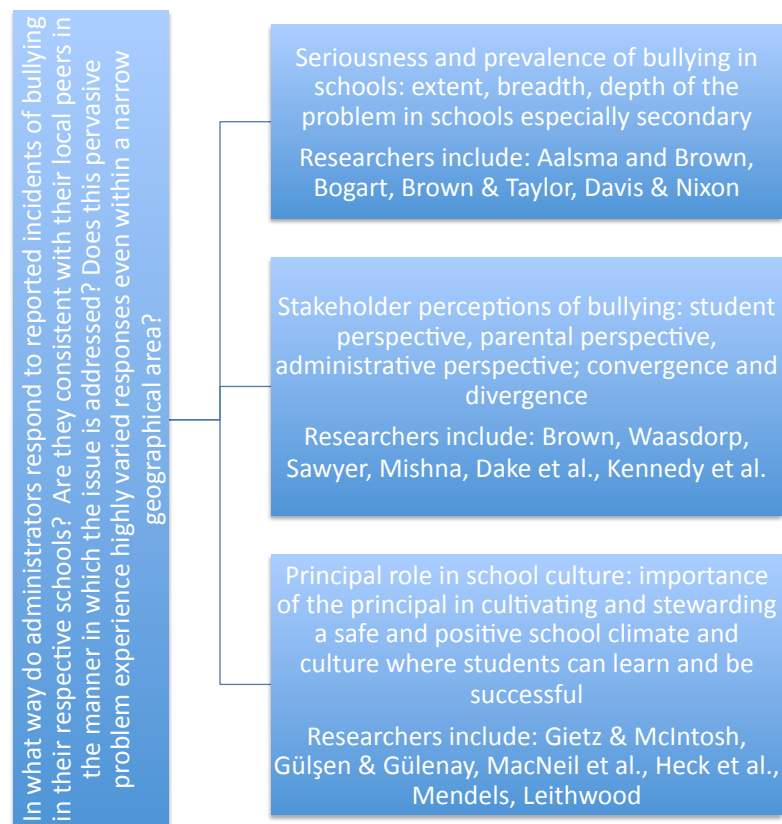
The research presented here is organized into three streams as noted in Figure 1.1. The first stream is designed to establish the seriousness and prevalence of bullying that exists in schools and gain an understanding of how different stakeholders identified the act of bullying. This was accomplished through a review of the broad literature base that exists relative to bullying. The researcher demonstrates that bullying is a pervasive and serious issue in schools that research suggests exists in almost every school in the country and as a result the topic is shown to be relevant and timely.

The second stream considers the perceptions that various stakeholders maintained on the subject of bullying. By understanding the manner in which students, parents, teachers, and administrators view both the problem of bullying and the manner in which it is addressed, the researcher identified the areas in which perceptions of bullying are incoherent and natural nucleation sites for disagreement about bullying. When the stakeholder groups are in disagreement, it is unlikely that bullying will be addressed in a unified manner. This stream is essential to helping principals develop a comprehensive understanding of bullying through various stakeholder lenses and thus responding to bullying incidents in a comprehensive manner that is most likely to satisfy the needs of each representative group.

The third stream includes an analysis of the importance of the principal and assistant principal in the culture and climate of the school for which he or she was the leader. This stream is important in validating why the perceptions and actions of the principal are central to the topic of bullying. The research showed that the principal was a critical contributor in setting a positive school climate. Moreover, the principal leads

the academic and behavior vision for the school. A principal aware of the detrimental effects of bullying and bullying behavior has the ability to set procedures, provide programming, and address bullying or other problem behavior within the school. The leadership role of the principal is critical to the success of any initiative, including school-wide positive behavior programs and anti-bullying campaigns.

Figure 1.1. Conceptual framework.



Definition of Terms

Cyber Bullying: hurting or threatening others through telecommunications including e-mail, chat rooms, instant messaging, websites, or texting (Eaton et al., 2012; Wang & Iannotti, 2012).

Direct Bullying: aggressive behavior(s) that occur in the presence of the targeted youth. Examples of direct aggression include but are not limited to face-to-face interaction, such as pushing the targeted youth or directing harmful written or verbal communication at a youth (Gladden et al., 2014).

Indirect Bullying: aggressive behavior(s) that are not directly communicated to the targeted youth. Examples of indirect aggression include but are not limited to spreading false and/or harmful rumors or communicating harmful rumors electronically (Gladden et al., 2014).

Physical Bullying: the use of physical force by the perpetrator against the targeted youth. Examples include but are not limited to behaviors such as hitting, kicking, punching, spitting, tripping, and pushing (Gladden et al., 2014).

Verbal Bullying: oral or written communication by the perpetrator against the targeted youth that causes him or her harm. Examples include but are not limited to mean taunting, calling the youth names, threatening or offensive written notes or hand gestures, inappropriate sexual comments, or threatening the youth verbally (Gladden et al., 2014).

Relational Bullying: behaviors by a perpetrator designed to harm the reputation and relationships of the targeted youth. Direct relational bullying includes but is not limited to efforts to isolate the targeted youth by keeping him or her from interacting with their peers or ignoring them. Indirect relational bullying includes but is not limited to

spreading false and/or harmful rumors, publicly writing derogatory comments, or posting embarrassing images in a physical or electronic space without the target youth's permission or knowledge (Gladden et al., 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

It was assumed, but not verified, that administrators varied the manner in which they investigated and disciplined reported acts of bullying, the basis for the research presented herein. Additionally, the researcher assumed there was a measurable difference in administrator responses across one or more of the participant schools presented. Additionally, it was assumed that school districts were compliant with the state law in the area of bullying and that the policies created by each school were accessible for review as a part of the data collection for this study. It was further assumed that the participants in the study would have applicable experience in the area of bullying and be able to contribute meaningfully to the study. The researcher assumed the fundamental expectation that administrators were in full compliance with all applicable state and federal laws and regulations regarding bullying and that their responses to questions about bullying were true and honest when participating in this study.

Limitations

There were inherent limitations when using various sites for a study such as this. It was expected that each school would have different policies both addressing bullying and addressing student conduct in school. As such, there were likely to be differences in the extrinsic motivations students had in each school to follow the published policies and discipline codes due to the variances in severity of punishments for inappropriate

behavior. Additionally, using a multiple site study naturally means that there will be certain social, environmental, and cultural factors that could not be controlled from one location to another. While there was no empirical evidence that indicated that bullying is more or less prevalent with certain environmental or cultural conditions, the culture and climate of each individual school and district must be considered when evaluating the results of the study.

Delimitations

The study presented contained several delimitations generally focused on the methodology of the study. Important to the regional nature of the case study itself, the researcher made a decision regarding the location in which the study would occur. Participating schools were located in the east central region of Pennsylvania. Such regionalization allowed the researcher to draw generalizations about the area and ensure that each school is compliant with state laws and regulations that govern the topics to be researched. The researcher also selected the sample size of the study (one case with six participating perspectives) based on the case study models of Yin (2009) and Creswell (2013). Though moderate, the sample size allowed the researcher to draw conclusions about schools in the region and make connections to schools similarly situated in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and collect a robust amount of data relative to the case study. Additionally, the researcher decided to include only traditional, public high schools in the study, limiting both the level and type of school to be researched in the study. Therefore, no charter, magnet, or cyber schools are included in the participant pool.

Summary

With bullying an ever-present problem in schools in America and across the globe, the more research that exists in the field to assist practitioners in conducting thorough investigations as well as implementing consistent discipline, the more likely schools can find meaningful solutions to the bullying epidemic. The research presented here was designed to inform practitioners in the field of education about the application of the state law in both investigating and disciplining for bullying. By uncovering the manner in which various administrators' address and discipline bullying in their respective schools, the researcher believed patterns of effective and less effective procedures would be revealed. Such information is essential to refining school district practices and keeping young people in schools safe. By informing the stakeholders in these areas, the likelihood of meaningful, effective, and unified intervention increases allowing for appropriate ongoing mitigation of bullying behavior.

The next chapter focuses on the existing research regarding the seriousness and prevalence of bullying, stakeholder perceptions on the topic of bullying, and the role the principal has in establishing a positive school climate and culture. These research streams are critically important in building a knowledge base upon which the research questions and problem statement are based. The numerous scholarly works identify the gaps in the literature, which this study attempts to contribute.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

As discussed in chapter one, bullying is an evolving and urgent matter for schools. As such, the research in multiple areas of bullying has been explored thoroughly. The review of the literature presented herein focuses on three streams of research. The first stream of literature is focused on the seriousness and prevalence of bullying. This is important to consider as both the motivation and the backdrop for the continued need to research bullying. Emerging research indicates not only the high percentage of students that state they have been victims of bullying but also the link between victimization and negative future personal and social outcomes. In addition, this stream will help to describe why bullying has become a national and international phenomenon not only in schools but also in other areas of society.

The second stream considers the perceptions that various stakeholders have on the subject of bullying. There is a growing body of research that aims to show how students, parents, teachers, and administrators view bullying as well as illuminate the different mental models each stakeholder group maintains. The literature in this area is critical to developing congruence connecting each of the research streams presented. Additionally, establishing a knowledge base in this area is critical to school administrators understanding bullying through a broad lens that permits disciplinarians to make informed decisions with the understanding of how each stakeholder perceives bullying. The research indicates gaps in the way each stakeholder views the act of bullying, which may have an effect on the manner in which a disciplinarian views the act versus the manner in which a parent, student, or teacher views the act resulting in various levels of

agreement on the outcomes of the disciplinarian's actions to prevent or address bullying behavior.

The final stream focuses on the effect a school principal has on his or her school climate and culture. Schools are social environments and the social norms are established, cultivated, and curated by the leader (Price, 2012). The research indicates a link between positive school climate and overall feelings of trust, teacher satisfaction, and student performance (Gülşen & Gülenay, 2014; Price, 2012). This stream is an important link between the principal and the school environment thus supporting the need to understand the manner in which school principals and assistant principals identify and address bullying in schools. Additionally, the building principal serves two major functions as the building leader, chief curriculum officer, and custodian of the building budget. When looking to address and prevent bullying, many schools turn to school-wide positive behavior programs which not only require the curricular approval of the principal, but also the financial backing of the school budget to support the cost of the programs.

Seriousness and Prevalence of Bullying

The research is clear with regards to the seriousness and prevalence of bullying; the effects of bullying are both acute and long-term, academic and social, and in some cases even fatal (Hollandsworth, 2011). Bullying has been extensively researched and the findings are concerning and tragic. According to Petrosino, Guckenburg, DeVoe, and Hanson (2010), "bullying appears to be frequent among U.S. students and has been associated with several short- and long-term negative consequences such as depression and poor health"(p. i). As academic institutions, schools should be keenly aware that

victims of bullying achieve at a rate lower than that of their non-bullied peers (Thomas, 2012). A study by Juvonen, Wang, and Espinoza (2010) found that "...the more bullied the students perceived themselves, the lower grades they obtained" (p. 163). The magnitude of the effect is staggering; the researchers found that, "peer victimization can account for up to an average of 1.5 letter grade decrease in the subject across the 3 years of middle school" (p. 165). The effect of victimization goes beyond just academic achievement; the same researchers found that there was a notable impact on teacher reported levels of student engagement. They found, "students with stronger sense of being bullied were likely not only to obtain lower grades but were also rated by their teachers as less academically engaged consistently across all data points within the 3 years of middle school" (p. 166). The results are consistent with similar research studies that found that increased perceptions of bullying resulted in decreased academic performance. Lacey, Cornell, and Konold (2015) studied how the prevalence of teasing and bullying (PTB) is associated with student performance on standardized testing. They found, "...student and teacher perceptions of greater PTB were associated with lower school passing rates on six Virginia Standards of Learning exams administered in middle school" (p. 19). These results were consistent with prior studies by Lacey and Cornell (2013; 2014) which showed a negative relation between greater PTB and results on similar state standardized testing.

The consistent results in the area of academic consequences as a result of bullying victimization are not limited to students within the United States. Other studies have found the same result is seen in students in Norway as well. Strøm, Thoresen, Wentzel-Larsen, and Dyb (2013) found that, "on an individual level, bullying, in addition to

violence and sexual abuse, was uniquely associated with lower grades” (p. 249). The consistencies in the data suggest that bullying is a global issue that has serious impact on student academic performance. The research presents methods to combat the problems presented by bullying to both improve student academic performance and school climate. Lacey et al. (2015) suggest school-wide positive behavior programs have a positive impact on both academic performance and school culture, “schoolwide interventions may be successful, in part, by targeting school personnel, parents, and student perceptions and behaviors related to bullying and setting firm rules and sanctions for bullying behaviors” (p. 22). The Lacey et al. (2015) research aligns with the research presented here, as this researcher will explore how schools in eastern central Pennsylvania approach the rules and sanctions for bullying behavior.

It is critical to remember that bullying is a far more complex issue affecting more than just academics. Academic performance is just one area that is affected by bullying and bullying behaviors; there are significant personal and social ramifications from victimization from bullying that is explored in the following section.

The effects of bullying can be extremely pervasive and the psychological effects can last years beyond the acute trauma. Aalsma and Brown (2008) found that victims of bullying have increased rates of depression, suicidal thoughts, and loneliness. Additionally, they found that there was a correlation to lower grades, a feeling of dislike toward school, and increased rates of absenteeism. Aalsma and Brown (2008) also found that “young people who had been bullied repeatedly throughout middle adolescence had lower self-esteem and higher depressive symptoms as young adults compared to those who had not been bullied. Hence, victimization is related to significant psychosocial

effects throughout adolescence and into young adulthood.” (Aalsma & Brown, 2008, p. 101). This information is consistent with a recently released study from Bogart et al. (2014) which analyzed peer victimization in grade five and the health of those victimized five years later, in tenth grade.

The work of Bogart et al. (2014) indicates and supports previous research that those who are victims of chronic bullying have an association with worse psychological and physical health. Additionally, Bogart et al. (2014) saw an increased likelihood of repeated bullying once a student had been a victim of bullying in the past; 30.2% of students surveyed indicated they were victims of frequent bullying in either the present survey grade or at some point in the past. The researchers found victims of bullying had higher instances of low psychological health and bullying victims could also account for a higher rate of students in the lowest decile of physical health.

The pervasiveness of bullying can have negative outcomes in expected areas of development including academic, social, and psychological effects. But there are other, less obvious outcomes that are also correlated to bullying victimization. A study from Great Britain by researchers S. Brown and Taylor (2008) indicates a correlation between bullying victimization and decreased earnings potential later in life. They found, “being bullied at school has a statistically significant negative influence on earnings. Indeed, a 1 point move up the bullying index at age 7 decreases the wage by approximately 3.1%, *c. paribus*” (p. 397, emphasis in original). Brown and Taylor (2008) also found that the closer to entering the labor market an individual was bullied, the more of an adverse effect the victim had on lifetime earning. Such a finding makes a compelling argument for directing more attention to bullying at the secondary level as much of the bullying

research occurs at the elementary and middle levels. S. Brown and Taylor (2008) say, “much focus in the existing literature has been directed towards primary schools where bullying appears to be more prevalent. Our findings suggest that it is also important to curb bullying in secondary schools in order to alleviate the adverse effects on human capital attainment” (p. 399). With known academic and psychological consequences, it stands to reason that effects of bullying would extend beyond the schoolhouse gate as seen in the work of S. Brown and Taylor (2008) as victimized students advance beyond school age and into the workforce.

The work of Davis and Nixon (2011) highlights the difficulty in addressing bullying. The researchers found that two-thirds of students were employing strategies that were least effective when addressing bullying, including attempting to deal with the problem alone. The researchers found that building community, involving others, and instituting consistent methods of accountability were most effective in addressing bullying behaviors. Further complicating the issue of addressing the behavior is the fact that bullying is generally a covert act that largely goes unnoticed and thus unaddressed by school personnel. One study found that only 4% of bullying incidents are seen by teachers or administrators (Goodwin, 2011). Thus, researchers often rely on student self reports to document the prevalence of bullying. However, research indicates that students who are bullied report the incidents only 36% of the time, and usually only after injury or repeated incidents (Goodwin, 2011). Depending on the parameters of the operational definitions used, researchers have found the rate of students that have experienced bullying to range from 13-75% (Swearer et al., 2010) with many studies resting in the 20-30% occurrence range (DeVoe & Bauer, 2011; Eaton et al., 2012).

While the studies yield inconsistent results, likely due to the various definitions of bullying used in research (Gladden et al., 2014), the prevalence of bullying in schools is uncontroverted.

A final, but troubling, relationship is also present in the literature regarding bullying: the correlation between suicide and victims of bullying (Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010). A suicide influenced by bullying has even been given a colloquial name: bullycide (Thomas, 2012). This correlation is seen in a study conducted by Meltzer, Vostanis, Ford, Bebbington, and Dennis (2011) in which the raw correlation showed those who were reported of victims of bullying were nearly four times as likely to have a lifetime suicide attempt than those who did not report such victimization. Even after accounting for confounding factors and childhood adversities, victims of bullying “were still more than twice as likely as other adults to attempt suicide later in life” (Meltzer et al., 2011, p. 499).

The literature has begun to shed light onto the both the number of students that experience bullying students face in their academic careers, but also the amplitude of the bullying faced. Thomas (2012) provides statistics that show bullying is extremely pervasive and affects a large amount of students. She says,

The statistics on bullying are astounding. A 2002 survey of 512 students in America reported that 53% of the students knew someone who was a bully, and 61% stated that they observed someone being bullied during a school day (Good et al., 2011). Recently, the World Health Organization identified Canada and the United States as “12th and 15th, respectively, out of 35 countries in terms of reported prevalence of bullying behavior” (Good et al., 2011, p. 48). In 2007,

almost one out of three students between the ages of 12-18 said they had been bullied (U.S. Department of Justice). Reports from the stated they had either been bullied or had bullied others. In 2007, nearly 3 million high school students were physically bullied by being shoved, pushed, tripped, or spat on at school and also avoidance of certain places at school to avoid victimization (Robers, Zhang, Truman, & Snyder, 2010). (pp. 52-53)

These data are supported by other academic research. Goodwin (2011) notes that only 36% of students report being bullied with an astounding 64% not making any report whatsoever. Additionally, such reports generally come only "...after repeated incidents or physical injury" (p. 82). The data are not consistent in quantifying the number of students affected by bullying in American schools. The various definitions of bullying likely have an effect on the accuracy of data collection in the area of bullying prevalence statistics (see Gladden et al. (2014); McNeil (2011); Olweus (1988); Petrosino et al. (2010)). Petrosino et al. (2010) cite statistics ranging from 16% to 32% of students reporting bullying victimization with one report indicating that 24% of public schools (not students) reported bullying as a "...daily or weekly problem during the 2005/06 school year" (p. 17). Bullying and bullying behavior are often noted as being the biggest issue facing schools. "In a Kaiser Family Foundation (2001) survey of more than 800 students, bullying, teasing, and "put downs" were rated together as the number one problem in school" (Boorstein, 2004; CNN, 2001 as cited in Petrosino et al. (2010)). Yet while the prevalence is seemingly at an alarmingly high rate, the reporting rate of bullying and bullying behavior is comparatively low. With adults only observing around 4% of all acts of bullying and bullying behavior (Goodwin, 2011), adults rely on students

to report such acts in order to investigate and address such behavior. Such reports are, however, not made at a high rate. According to analysis by Petrosino et al. (2010),

Only 35.8 percent of bullied students in the 2007 National Crime Victimization Survey School Crime Supplement indicated that their bullying victimization was reported to school officials (Dinkes, Kemp, and Baum 2009). In a survey of more than 2,000 Dutch elementary school students, 16 percent reported having been bullied during a six-month period; 53 percent of these victims reported the bullying to their teacher and 67 percent to parents (Fekkes, Pijpers, and Verloove-Vanhorick 2005). A survey administered by the Oklahoma Department of Health reported that 67 percent of students in grade 3, 47 percent of students in grade 5, and 20 percent of students in grade 7 who were bullied told an adult at the school (Middleton 2008). (p. 18)

As Petrosino et al. (2010) indicate, low reporting rates are devastating to appropriate and timely responses to bullying within a school. With an already documented low observation rate by adults (4%), low reporting yields make it difficult to address concerning bullying behavior. Underreporting is noted to become more prevalent as the victims grow older. “Underreporting of bullying makes it difficult for school officials...to learn about and deal effectively with victimization (Education Development Center 2008). Oliver and Candappa (2007) found that students are reluctant to tell adults about bullying and that this reluctance increases with age” (Petrosino et al., 2010, p. 18). Such research further advances the need to continue to research bullying at the secondary level. There are environmental factors, such as reduced reporting rates as age increases, which are unique to secondary schools that require additional research.

The next research stream discusses how the various stakeholders perceive the act of bullying. Such information is critical to individuals involved in the bullying decision-making process as they can have a better understanding of how each constituent group views bullying behavior. While this knowledge may not change the outcome of the decision-making process, knowing how each group views the act will help to facilitate communication and mitigate issues and concerns before they manifest.

Stakeholder Perceptions of Bullying

The results of research relative to stakeholder perceptions of bullying illustrated the varied perspective each interested party brings to a bullying situation. Understanding not only the motivations but also the understanding of each stakeholder group will not only help guide the research presented here, but also help frame the instrument presented in chapter three. Ultimately, the administrator in a school must make a judgment about the behaviors being reported as only 4% of bullying acts are observed by adults as noted in the previous research stream. As such, it is critical that the administrator have a clear and robust understanding of the perspectives and mental models that each stakeholder group maintains.

Mental models are an important part of systems leadership as presented by Senge, Smith, Kruschwitz, Laur, and Schley (2008). The authors write, “our mental models are reflected in our core beliefs...[they] frequently live ‘below the surface’ and may even contradict the politically correct views that people express...”(p. 176). But acknowledging the presence of varying opinions or the mere existence of mental models is not enough to ensure that leaders are making decisions that are in the best interest of the organization and those involved. Senge et al. (2008) talk at length about knowing

what is below the surface of visible iceberg, a euphemism for a problem or crisis that challenges a leader. They say, “when people or organizations pay attention only to the visible tip of the iceberg, they can only react to change as it happens—so at best, they surviving the crisis” (p. 177). A deep understanding of stakeholders’ mental models will allow the administrator to make educated decisions with knowledge of the mental models each constituency brings to the situation. The remainder of this research stream seeks to inform the reader on the perspectives of these constituents.

Parent and Student Perceptions

A qualitative study by J. R. Brown et al. (2013) found that parents, by a large margin, felt that their reports of bullying went largely unaddressed. In their study they say, “our data suggest that all but one parent [n=11] believed their child’s victimization would continue even though they followed through in reporting bullying to their youth’s school officials” (J. R. Brown et al., 2013, p. 513). In fact, the parental experiences, while varied, were thematically similar. The authors found that parents struggled to identify to whom they should make a report, and even after reporting bullying behavior, often times the behavior continued. The authors found that, “...several parents reported that despite repeated attempts to work with school officials, bullying episodes continued...school officials were perceived by parents as unable or unwilling to enforce their own school policy against bullying and therefore, provide protection” (p. 507). Of the 11 cases studied, the authors found only one case in which, after administrative intervention, the bullying stopped. The success of the one case resulted in the authors making the following recommendations, “school officials must go beyond the initial report and make a complete investigation that includes reporting back to parents what

will be done to provide safety” (p. 513). There are other nuances to the school-parent relationship that affect parents’ decisions to make reports to school officials to begin the investigation and intervention process.

Waasdorp et al. (2011) are quick to identify the necessary interaction between schools and parents in the effort to prevent and address bullying. The authors state, “identifying factors that are associated with parents’ perceptions of bullying and reactions to their child’s victimization may inform the development of collaborative intervention and prevention efforts” (p. 324). Therefore, the more information an administrator can bring to the parent-school conversation, there is increased likelihood of positive collaboration and bullying prevention. The authors also found that “the more favorable parents’ perceptions of the [school] climate were, the less likely they were to contact their child’s school or talk to their child in response to the victimization” (p. 324). Parents in the J. R. Brown et al. (2013) study had a generally negative perception of school officials relative to the handling of bullying situations. The study says, “from the perspective of all but one parent [n=11], school officials were perceived by parents as unable or unwilling to enforce their own school policy against bullying and therefore, provide protection” (J. R. Brown et al., 2013, p. 507). Though the perception parents have toward the school are potentially affected by the type of victimization the student experiences. “Our findings also underscore the importance of the form of victimization a child experienced and how it may influence both the perception of the school climate and parents’ responses” (Waasdorp et al., 2011, p. 333).

Though the question remains whether or not parents are able to identify what constitutes and does not constitute bullying. Research suggests that parents also have

been found to have a difficult time recognizing bullying behavior between their child and friends. Parents were found to indicate that their child having a lot of friends was a sign the child was less likely to be bullied, though this belief is not supported by the literature. Sawyer et al. (2011) found that, “children who have friends can still be bullied, and that children can be bullied by children who they consider to be their friends” (p. 1799) and since bullying between friends can be common, it “highlights the difficulty parents may experience when trying to identify behaviors as bullying when it occurs among friends” (p. 1799). Such a phenomenon leads to what could be a significant challenge for victims of bullying by a friend, hesitance by decision makers to accept friend-based bullying as legitimate. Consider the findings of a qualitative study of bullying from multiple perspectives; the researchers found that, “[a] significant finding was that at times adults did not consider incidents bullying, whereas the child did....When such discrepancies occurred between children and adults, the adults minimized or did not validate the child’s experience” (Mishna, 2004, p. 242). This is additionally significant because if a child feels as though their reports have gone unattended, it is likely that the child will be reticent to report future incidents (Mishna, 2004). The next section of this stream explores administrative perceptions of bullying which are critical in determining school response to bullying.

Administrator and Teacher Perceptions

One must also understand the perceptions of school teaching and administrative personnel as school officials are the most appropriate individuals to address school-based bullying. Kennedy et al. (2012) echo this sentiment. They say, “understanding the perceptions of teachers and administrators is crucial to the success of bullying prevention

efforts (p. 8). Beginning with principals, work by Dake, Price, Telljohann, and Funk (2004) found that principals have a skewed view of the prevalence of bullying in their own school. Their findings suggest that principals perceived the extent of bullying in their own school to be less than the extent in U.S. elementary schools in general. “Of 378 responding principals, only 2 (0.5%) perceived the extent of bullying in their school as worse than the extent in schools as a whole” (p. 384). The data therefore suggest that while principals are willing to accept that bullying is a problem in schools, it is not a problem to the same extent in their own school resulting in the following recommendation, “it is apparent that efforts must be made to educate principals regarding the magnitude of bullying problems in elementary schools and methods to reduce the bullying episodes” (p. 383).

There was also discrepancy in the way administrators and teachers perceive each other’s role in bullying prevention. Kennedy et al. (2012) found that there were statistically significant differences between the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding their role in bullying prevention. “Teachers felt more strongly that educators played an important role in bullying prevention; however, administrators felt more comfortable communicating with the parents of bullying victims” (p. 1). The discrepancy indicated that administrators do not fully understand and support the important role that teachers played in bullying prevention. The researchers indicated their findings were strong evidence for increasing training and professional development in order to employ a widespread approach to bullying. Kennedy et al. (2012) suggested, “increased dialogue and transparency between teachers and school administrators to ensure that both groups are working together to solve the ubiquitous bullying problem within schools” (p. 9).

Above, it is mentioned that teachers and administrators are believed to only witness around 4% of bullying incidents (Goodwin, 2011) which, if accurate, would certainly affect teacher perceptions regarding bullying. A study by Mishna et al. (2005) found that “many teachers were unaware that their students were bullied.” (p. 729). With bullying victimization rates between 16% and 32%, the perception of teachers that their students are unaffected or uninvolved in bullying is troubling and, more dangerously so, inaccurate. Mishna et al. (2005) discuss that teachers do not always perceive bullying in the same way that students do and, as such, might trivialize or ignore acts which do not meet the teacher’s personal definition of bullying. The researchers say, “it is important for teachers to recognize how they understand and respond to bullying can have an effect on their students” (p. 732).

Perhaps the most illustrative example of the importance of understanding perceptions of bullying from various stakeholders was presented by Gietz and McIntosh (2014) which found that schools can unwittingly support a culture of bullying with actively intending to do so. They say,

In a survey conducted by Pepler and Craig (2000), 71% of teachers said they usually intervene in bullying incidents, yet only 25% of students reported that their teachers intervened. Furthermore, in most cases, students believe that neither their teachers nor their classmates would intervene to stop bullying (Unnever & Cornell, 2003). Schools can thus unwittingly support a “culture of bullying” where students can act aggressively without fear of reprimand, bystanders do not intervene or report incidents, and adults do not actively supervise students. (p. 163)

It is the culture within the school that the principal can affect most as the leader. The principals' role in impacting school climate and culture is more deeply explored in the next stream of research.

The perceptions of the various stakeholder groups inform the research presented herein as a potential corollary to other variables present in bullying situations. Knowing the research foundation of bully perceptions helps the researcher to determine if the results of the research are similar to the literature or unique to the population studied. Central to the conversation about school climate and culture is the building principal. The principal is integral in setting expectations for both student and staff behavior and he or she can institute anti-bullying curricula and or provide training and education to the staff about the state of student behavior in the school. The next research stream focuses on the impact the principal has on a school setting.

Principal Role in School Culture

Maslow's (1943) seminal work on human motivation included a scaffold of five levels of needs that humans must meet sequentially in order to proceed to the next, higher, level of motivation. The first need that Maslow identifies is a physiological need, the physical requirements needed in order to survive such as food, water, air, and shelter. The second and more apropos level to the work presented here is the need for safety. Maslow (1943) says, "practically everything looks less important than safety, (even sometimes the physiological needs which being satisfied, are now underestimated). A man, in this state, if it is extreme enough and chronic enough, may be characterized as living almost for safety alone" (p. 376). Safety is essential to moving to the higher levels of motivation including love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. In the educational

realm, it stands to reason that learning would not be possible without the basic human needs met first, followed by the ability to explore new learning and understanding.

Bullying in schools threatens a student's feeling of safety and thus threatens his or her ability to focus on anything else in the school environment but the safety concerns.

"Beyond simply reducing bullying and victimization, creating school environments where students feel safe, protected, and ready to learn is a fundamental goal for schools...Feeling unsafe at school represents a significant barrier to learning" (Gietz & McIntosh, 2014, p. 164). Bullying is a matter of an organizational culture, in both the structures that permit and deter its existence. In a school organizational culture the principal is the leader and chief executive who sets the tone and expectations of the building and its members. "The leadership of the principal is the key factor in the formation of school climate. A positive correlation has been found between educational leadership and school climate, resulting in greater school efficacy (Sisman 2011)" (Gülşen & Gülenay, 2014, p. 96). The research presented here was designed to support the principal's role in both establishing and maintaining a positive school climate, which, as a result, produces positive student outcomes.

Gülşen and Gülenay (2014) studied the principal's role in school climate as measured on the Healthy School Scale, a measurement that divides the principal's role into three dimensions: the administrative, institutional, and technical function. The authors concluded that "[the principal plays a crucial role in the formation of the school climate, which, in turn, has a positive effect on the school's efficacy" (p. 99). Such a finding is in line with multiple other studies. Take, for example, the work of MacNeil, Prater, and Busch (2009) who state, "organizational theorists have long reported that

paying attention to culture is the most important action that a leader can perform” (p. 73). Student safety and security are basic components of a school’s vision for climate and culture. The authors’ analysis of literature found additional theorists with beliefs similar to their own. They say, “ultimately, the relationships that shape the culture and climate of the school are strongly influenced by the school principal. ‘In schools where achievement was high and where there was a clear sense of community, we found invariably that the principal made the difference’ (Boyer 1983: 219)” (MacNeil et al., 2009, p. 76). Their study concluded that exemplary schools “were found to possess healthier climates” than lower performing schools (MacNeil et al., 2009, p. 81).

In considering various types of leadership styles, Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) conducted a meta-analysis on various studies on the relationship between leadership and student outcomes. The results included information on a dimension of supporting student outcomes: ensuring an orderly and supportive environment. The study concluded, “these findings suggest that the leadership of effective schools is distinguished by emphasis on and success in establishing a safe and supportive environment through clear and consistently enforced social expectations and discipline codes (Heck et al., 1991).” (p. 664).

Mendels (2012) listed creating a “climate hospitable to education” as one of the five practices central to effective school leadership. She said, “to be sure, effective principals shape schools buildings characterized by the basics — safety and orderliness — but they also see to it that schools create an atmosphere in which students feel supported and responded to” (p. 55). Mendels put climate among other critical elements of an effective school leader including setting a vision, improving instruction, and

cultivating leadership in others. Mendels' work supported the research presented herein that maintaining a favorable climate and culture were an essential function of the principal and a critical component to student success.

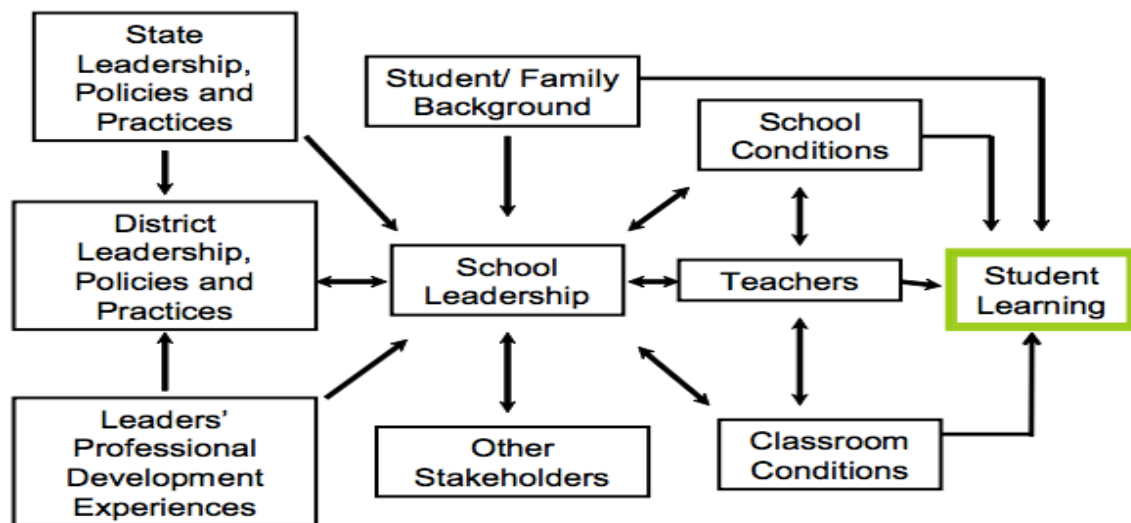
The work of Kenneth Leithwood proliferated the research on principal leadership and effectiveness. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) compiled research on leadership and student achievement and found that leadership has a significant impact on student learning. In fact, they found that, "leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (p. 5). The authors found that effect of leadership to be surprising and often underestimated noting that, "while evidence about leadership effects on student learning can be confusing to interpret, much of the existing research actually underestimates its effects. The total (direct and indirect) effects of leadership on student learning account for about a quarter of total school effects" (p. 5). Though based on the work of the various researchers presented here, the effect of the principal should not be underestimated as the leader is responsible for setting the vision of the school, promoting positive changes in instructional practices, and curating a positive climate for learning.

Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) continued the work of the 2004 study and found additional evidence to support the work regarding their "seven strong claims" regarding school leadership. In the 2008 work, the team found that the claims made in the 2004 work were supported by additional empirical evidence. They said, "our conclusion from this evidence as a whole is that leadership has very significant effects on the quality of school organisation and on pupil learning. As far as we are aware, there is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil

achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership” (Leithwood et al., 2008, p. 27).

Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2009) collaborated once more to continue following up on their work regarding the impact of principals on student achievement. Though slightly more refined and specific, the results of the 2009 work are similar to the results of the prior studies. They found, “in developing a starting point for this six-year study, we claimed, based on a preliminary review of research, that leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning. After six additional years of research, we are even more confident about this claim” (p. 9). The 2009 work also presented a synthesis of the various areas on which a school principal has influence using the following graphic:

Figure 2.1. Leadership influences on Student Learning (Louis, et al., 2009, p. 14)



The figure presented the multifaceted role of the principal in an easily understandable fashion. What appeared most interesting and appropriate to the research here was the

direct line between school leadership, school conditions, and student learning. The authors showed a direct leadership influence on the school conditions, which directly impacted student learning, thus highlighting the importance of the principal's role in school culture.

It should be noted, however, that not all studies corroborate the findings above. There were several studies that questioned the impact that a principal has on student achievement; however, these studies did not question the effect the principal had on setting the building climate and culture. One such study was conducted by Uline and Tschannen-Moran (2008). The authors found that, "although principals do not play a direct role in the delivery of instruction, collegial leaders articulate a set of expectations and set the tone for the school. In an extensive review of literature on principal leadership, Hallinger and Heck (1996), found primarily indirect effects of the principal's behavior on student achievement" (p. 61). The authors' results were in line with the work of Hallinger and Heck when they concluded, "...the principal's leadership style plays an indirect rather than a direct role in fostering student achievement. These findings were in concert with those of Hallinger and Heck (1996) that principals mediate student achievement by setting the tone for a strong emphasis on academics and teacher professionalism" (p. 66).

Another related area of research worth consideration included the works of leadership theorists such as Otto Scharmer who encouraged leaders to be aware of what he deemed are "blind spots," areas of institutional or managerial learning that are not always visible on the surface. Bullying certainly falls into such a category as much of the research indicates that only 4% of bullying incidents are witnessed by teachers or

administrators (Goodwin, 2011). Scharmer (2009) discusses such blind spots in the following way, “institutional blind spots encompass both leadership and structure. We must face the sobering fact that we, as leaders and managers, do not have a methodology for approaching the key challenges that surface in emerging complexity” (p. 79). What Scharmer called a blind spot Peter Senge described as an iceberg, where only part of a leadership dilemma is visible on the surface and that there is much more unseen underneath. Senge et al. (2008) said, “events can so dominate our attention that we get stuck here and, as a result, miss the bigger picture entirely....When people are stuck at this level, they only see the tip of the iceberg and can do little except react as new circumstances arise” (pp. 173-174). Heifetz and Linsky (2002) shared similar beliefs about challenging leadership scenarios. They said, “leadership would be a safe undertaking if your organizations and communities only faced problems for which they already knew the solutions” (p. 13). Such an observation was apropos to the work presented here as the researcher attempted to gather a collective understanding about a common problem that faces all schools and all school leaders. By establishing a community of learners, it is possible that the resultant work may shed light on a leadership or institutional blind spot and help to provide solutions to the complex leadership situation that bullying presents.

The connection between student achievement and school culture were well established in both the research stream regarding the prevalence and seriousness of bullying but also within the stream presented here. Undoubtedly, the principal has a significant impact on a student’s ability to learn and perform at school. The principal’s ability to set a vision for the school and steward the climate and culture of a building are

critical to the importance of the research presented here. A safe and secure environment is essential to student learning outcomes.

The next chapter addresses the method by which the participants were identified and the manner in which the research was conducted. The case study approach included both a structured interview protocol and a document analysis to better understand the way that administrators are investigating and disciplining bullying within their school system.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of the research presented here was to study the manner in which high school administrators in eastern Pennsylvania investigate reports and consequence students with regards to the topic of bullying. Understanding the manner in which administrators are successful or unsuccessful in their efforts to curb bullying behavior in schools is important to ongoing efforts of bullying prevention in schools. The study presented here presents the ways in which schools are consistent or inconsistent in their practices and whether or not administrators can identify barriers to the successful implementation of their anti-bullying efforts.

This chapter presents the research design and rationale by which the study was conducted, a case study approach, in order to fully develop answers to the research questions presented. Also addressed in this chapter are the sites and population used for the study providing information about access to participants and a description of the research sites. The research method is detailed with a description of the method by which data was collected and the manner in which it was analyzed as well as the stages in which it was collected. Lastly, this chapter provides the ethical considerations for the study and the method by which participants were notified about such considerations.

The research in the study was guided by four research questions, one central question and three sub-questions. The central question was: what is the administrative experience in responding to reported bullying incidents at the high school level? This question was answered through qualitative means and thus required no hypothesis. The

sub-questions sought to identify patterns and correlations to the central question; they were as follows:

1. What actions do high school administrators take when investigating reported incidents of bullying?
2. What methods of discipline do high school administrators utilize when addressing confirmed incidents of bullying?
3. What challenges do high school administrators face when investigating and administering consequence for incidents of bullying?

Research Design and Rationale

Introduction of the Design

The research presented here was conducted following the methodology for collective case study design. Additionally, this case study design allowed the researcher to analyze “multiple sources of information” reporting the results as “a case description and case themes” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). This study focused on the regional trends in administrative response to bullying, or what Creswell (2013) would call “a decision process” (p. 98), a less concrete type of case study design. The decision to use case study methodology is additionally supported by the work of Yin (2009). Yin (2009) states that case study methodology is appropriate due to the facts that the researcher exerts no control over the behavior events and the focus of the research is on contemporary, rather than historical, events and context (p. 8). In the case study method presented here, “... the researcher focuses on an issue or concern, and then selects one bounded case to illustrate the issue” (Creswell, 2013, p. 99). The researcher used multiple participants

and multiple sources of information to provide a robust and complete view of the case being studied.

The case study methodology allowed the researcher to analyze multiple sources of data including interviews, reports, documents, policies, and procedures as a way of building a case description to most accurately represent the experience of each of the participants. Participants were able to provide applicable policies, written procedures, anti-bullying programs, and student disciplinary codes to fully describe each school's approach to the subject. The document analysis was integral to developing a clear and differential analysis of the various participants in the study. In addition, the use of the case study methodology was not limiting to the researcher based on the nature of the central and sub research questions presented in the study (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009).

Rationale

The administrators in the identified region all shared a common set of school laws under which their schools operated. As such, the manner in which each school interpreted and applied the laws was unique to each place. The researcher was seeking to understand the regional commonality of applying bullying law, and in turn the application of the policies required by the law, under the shared experience of each participating school coming from the same state with the same overarching requirements.

The nature of the research questions makes them best suited for qualitative research methods to uncover the nuances of the work being done by educational practitioners. As such, the researcher evaluated the five qualitative inquiry designs presented by Creswell (2013) to select the most appropriate methodology to elicit descriptive data and present the findings for the study. While other methods were

considered and rejected, the case study approach was accepted for several reasons. First, the case study approach was appropriate for the expected sample size of the study presented; the researcher studied one overarching regional case with six participants contributing to the understanding of the regional case (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, Stake (1995) states that “case study research is not sampling research. We do not study a case primarily to understand other cases. Our first obligation is to understand this one case” (p. 4). The research presented here provides an in-depth look at the manner in which administrators in one specific regional area respond to reported acts of bullying.

Second, the case study allowed for the collection of multiple forms of data including interviews and artifacts in the form of reports, documents, policies, and procedures. In addition, case study is appropriate where the intent of the research is to “understand a specific issue...and a case or cases selected to best understand the problem” (p.98). As a regional case study exploring the manner in which multiple, similarly situated districts address the same problem, a single bounded case with multiple participants and interview coupled with artifact collection was necessary to fully explore the topic.

The focus of the case study was to develop an in-depth description and analysis of “a case or multiple cases” (Creswell 2013, p. 104). Such a distinction is unique to case study as compared to the other four approaches (narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography) and is important to the study presented herein since the research was designed to uncover then describe and analyze the data collected. Additionally, since policies, procedures, and codes are important to the research

presented, a case study approach not only permits, but also requires the use of multiple sources to support the body of research.

The case study presented here will follow the case study protocol prescribed by Yin (2009). The protocol contains four distinct sections including an overview of the case study project, field procedures, case study questions, and a guide for the case study report (p. 81). Elements of the protocol will be discussed in the following sections discussing specific methodological decisions made by this researcher.

Site and Population

Population Description

The target population for this study was traditional public high school administrators who work within a four county area in and around the Lehigh Valley area of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Participants served in a role in their school that deals directly with investigating and disciplining incidents of bullying. These individuals included, but were not limited to, building principals, assistant or vice principals, and those serving in the role of dean of students. Individuals must have possessed a valid Pennsylvania principal certificate to have their data included in the results, which ensured that all individuals had completed training as set by the Pennsylvania Department of Education for the role they fill in their school. The researcher conducted interviews with individuals who met the job title requirements stated above and who worked at public, traditional high schools. Charter schools, cyber schools, and hybrid cyber/traditional schools were not included in this research. The age and gender of the participants was varied, but both of these demographic markers were collected as part of the study interview protocol. Six case study interviews were conducted and analyzed for this

collective regional case study. Relative to case study participants, Creswell (2013) states that using one case is appropriate for case study methodology, “the study of more than one case dilutes the overall analysis; the more cases an individual studies, the less depth in any single case” (p. 101). This study operated under the mindset that there is one regional case being studied with six to eight perspectives describing the same case and similar shared experiences. Creswell (2013) says, “the researcher might select for study several programs from several research sites or multiple programs within a single site” (p. 99). This study ascribes to the latter of Creswell’s descriptors, multiple programs within a single, though regional, site. The researcher selected the participant number (n=6) to both clearly understand the case at hand and collect a robust amount of data to draw conclusions and inferences from the data.

Participating schools were assigned a random number from 1-6 in order for the researcher to collect and organize the data. Only participant numbers will be used when referencing participating schools in the results section of the study. Only the researcher will have access to the information that identifies participants. This information is kept in a locked file cabinet accessible only to the researcher in his home.

Site Description

The primary unifying elements of each site are that they are traditional, stand-alone, public high schools with either grades 9-12 or 10-12 exclusively enrolled in the school. Each school was part of four neighboring counties in eastern Pennsylvania (Lehigh County, Northampton County, Carbon County, and Bucks County). This area was identified for two reasons. The first reason was geographical proximity to the researcher; all schools in the counties identified are within a one-hour commute for the

researcher ensuring accessibility for interviews. The second reason was to ensure geographic consistency and localized generalizability for the data collection.

Using traditional high schools was a deliberate choice intended to standardize the type of school administrator responding to the survey and interview. Alternative schools and alternative schooling arrangements, either charter, cyber, or hybrid, have structural and possible personnel differences that would increase the number of factors for which the researcher would need to account or control. By using a uniform definition of high school and administrator, the researcher can more easily compare the environments, experiences, and policies from which this study draws.

Since the data collection was an interview followed by document collection, the researcher traveled to each participating administrator who agreed to participate in the research project. Therefore, there were no considerations or identified need to utilize a centralized site to conduct participant interviews. The location within each building for the interview was strictly up to the school administrator, but it was assumed that the location would be private and quiet for the purpose of accurate data collection. The interviews were digitally recorded, with express participant consent, on a minimum of two devices for redundant data collection in case one device should fail. All aspects of the data collection and the nature of the study were fully disclosed to participants prior to and at the time of the interview and participants consented to all components of the research, including audio recording the interview.

Site Access

There were no known or anticipated issues related to site access. It was assumed that all administrators had access to Internet, professional email, and reliable computers

that allowed the administrator to communicate with the researcher relative to participating in the designed interview. In addition, participation in the interview was strictly voluntary and it was assumed that by volunteering to participate in an interview, the administrators had accounted for any site issues at their location that would inhibit a meaningful interview environment. High school administrators participate in numerous confidential meetings as part of their normal daily responsibilities. These meetings include faculty or evaluation meetings, parent meetings, disciplinary meetings, faculty or staff disciplinary meetings, and informal and formal disciplinary proceedings. It was assumed that the needs for site access for participation in this study did not exceed the needs of the participation in any of the other aforementioned meetings in which the administrator may participate on a daily basis.

Research Methods

Description of Each Method Used

The researcher utilized a qualitative approach with the case study design based on the case study methodology of Cresswell (2013) and Yin (2009). The participants each participated in a five-part structured interview protocol. The protocol was designed to ask questions in such a manner that was applicable to all participants. The questions were designed to be open-ended to better understand the experience of the participant through their own rich descriptions and explanations. Included in the survey was one conditional response question that was skipped if not applicable to the participant. The entire interview protocol is available for review in Appendix C.

The first part of the interview protocol requested basic participant and site demographic data from the participant including age, gender, years of experience as an

administrator, student enrollment of the school, and the PDE issued School Performance Profile (SPP) score for the school for school year 2014-2015. The purpose of gathering such demographic information was to tell the story of both the administrator and the school. The SPP is a standard measure against which all schools in Pennsylvania are scored. By using this standard measure, the researcher could make connections between schools with similar or dissimilar SPP scores when attempting to generalize the data collected.

Part two of the interview protocol gathered general information about the district and the overall school efforts to address bullying. The questions focused on existing programs and procedures the district and its administrators used in anti-bullying campaigns that may have been present. These questions were designed to gather a general understanding of the manner in which each school addressed bullying behavior and the formalized processes that may or may not have existed at each site.

Parts three and four of the interview protocol were designed to address sub-questions one and two of the research questions driving this study. The questions sought to elicit experiential information from the participating administrators regarding the manner in which they investigate and consequence bullying in their respective schools. The open-ended nature of the questions was designed to allow the participant the opportunity to provide explanation and description in support of their programs and efforts without guiding or leading by the interviewer.

Part five of the interview protocol asked participants to elaborate on their experiences with barriers to implementing their protocols as well as barriers in addressing bullying issues as a whole. In uncovering the barriers to implementation, the researcher

developed a robust view of both that which works and does not work in addressing bullying in high schools in the regional area included in the participant pool. Perceived barriers also presented common areas where administrators struggle or are blocked from successful program implementation, something the audience of this research study may find critically important. Knowing what administrators perceive are the barriers to addressing bullying may also make known areas where future research could explore.

The second methodology the researcher used in this study was an artifact analysis. Separate from the interview, the researcher requested and collected various artifacts from each participant for comparative review. The researcher sought reports, documents, policies, procedures, and codes from each participant. The researcher conducted a comparative document analysis of the artifacts from each participant and established common themes as well as notable differences between the participating schools. The information gathered during this part of the research process helped to support the case study by collecting “many forms of qualitative data, ranging from interviews, ... to documents” as outlined by Cresswell (2013, p. 98). The artifact collection matrix is available for review in Appendix D.

Such data and evidence helped to build an in-depth understanding of the bullying program present at each participating school and the manner in which each school was consistent to its regional peers. The evidentiary documents included school board policy, administrative regulations, school-wide positive behavior documents, and student codes of conduct as provided by the participating administrators. If participating administrators did provide the documents or are otherwise unable to provide the documents, the researcher planned to make two other attempts to gather the documents through repeated

written requests. If all attempts were unsuccessful, such information would have been presented and noted in the document analysis of the results section and the correlating data for the participating school will be left blank. All schools provided the requested information for this study to the researcher on the first attempt.

Data Analysis Procedures

The qualitative data was analyzed in four ways as described by Creswell (2013). The analysis began with a description of the multiple sites contributing to the research where the researcher highlights pertinent information about the sites, activities, and participants for each case. This descriptive analysis presents to the reader the similarities and differences between each district; additionally, the researcher will identify any demographic outliers within the participant group. Next, the data was arranged using categorical aggregation where the categorical descriptors were emergent from the interview data collection rather than a priori codes. The categorical aggregates were then collapsed into a smaller number of broader themes that accurately depicted the categories that they encompassed. Lastly, the researcher developed naturalistic generalizations about the case study (p. 200). Yin (2009) also suggests the use of a cross-case synthesis for a multiple case study. Creswell (2013) incorporates the cross-case synthesis model into the categorical aggregation step of the process. The cross-case synthesis will be presented as a visual “word table that display the data from the individual cases according to some uniform framework” (Yin, 2009, p. 156). The synthesis will allow for a visual comparison between the various methods employed by administrators in addressing and disciplining for bullying.

The researcher also completed a comparative analysis of the document collection. The documents are presented in table format as Yin (2009) suggests in order to analyze each document to a uniform framework. The interview results were considered with the artifact analysis when looking to answer the central research question of the study. The two methods resulted in a broad view of the bullying practices, protocols, and procedures for each participating school that would not be possible with an interview alone. A complete understanding of the entire bullying reaction process was critical to making inferences and drawing conclusions about the regional state of bullying prevention and response.

Stages of Data Collection

The data collection occurred in two stages, with all participants completing the interview and document collection protocols within several weeks of each another. The participants were interviewed following a structured interview protocol, therefore the questions did not change from participant to participant. The researcher traveled to each participant to encourage participation and decrease the time commitment required for participation. All interview data collection occurred during one visit with the participant. The supplemental document and artifact collection was completed, when possible, during the same visit, though several participants provided electronic versions of the collected documents over email in the days and weeks following the interview. The researcher revisited one participant in order to collect pertinent documents in a visit subsequent to the interview. All participants completed all aspects of this study in less 90 total minutes. Overall participation parameters were designed to be unobtrusive to participating administrators.

Ethical Considerations

There was minimal anticipated risk to participants of this study; however, several ethical considerations were addressed. Minors were not considered for participation in this study therefore parental/legal consent was not required of the participants. Additionally, all research methods were explained to all participants in written form prior to participating in the survey instrument via email and via notification prior to accessing the survey tool. Prior to any interviews participants were given oral explanation and written explanation prior to providing informed consent for the interview. Participants were given the opportunity to recuse themselves from any part of the study at anytime throughout the process.

The qualitative interview portion of the study included individual consent prior to participation. Those who were willing to participate in an interview were audio recorded with participants' express permission and the recordings were transcribed. Neither the participant's name nor identifying information was included in the interview transcript. Participants were able to stop the interview at any time. If a participant chose to end the interview the recording would have been destroyed and the participant would not have been included in the qualitative portion of the study. No participants exercised this option during the study.

In order to protect the rights of the participants, the researcher kept participants anonymous at all times throughout the research and analysis. The researcher anonymized identifiable data, including exact school population and school performance profile scores, to protect the identity of participating schools as these data are specific enough to assign to individual schools. Participants were limited to adult, professional, and state

certified sitting principals and assistant principals for the proposed research. Some school districts may employ terms such as “vice principal” or “assistant to the principal.” For the purpose of this research, individuals that are serving in an administrative capacity where their responsibilities include serving as disciplinarian are eligible to participate in the study. Participants all possessed an active, valid state certification as a principal for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as stated in certification staffing policy guideline number 95 (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2013). The researcher secured informed consent from the participants throughout the process. Participants were given the opportunity to revoke consent at any time throughout the process. In addition, since the researcher has no known positional authority or supervisory responsibility over any of the participants, there was no risk or repercussion anticipated for any of the participants.

Chapter 4: Finding, Results, and Interpretations

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore the application of state bullying law within the high school setting. Bullying has garnered increasing national attention resulting in a renewed focus on bullying in schools. High profile, highly publicized cases (Shpigel, 2014) and tragic outcomes have led to implementation of bullying laws and changes in professional practice (Hu, 2011). However, the Pennsylvania bullying law ("Public School Code of 1949," 2008) provides minimal direction to school entities on the application of the law in school settings. The law mandates policy development and little more thus creating the possibility of wide ranges of practice within the various school districts of Pennsylvania. The focus of this research was to understand the experience of the participating administrators in interpreting and applying this law as a part of their daily practice. Additionally, the researcher sought to understand the challenges an administrator faces when both investigating and providing consequence for bullying incidents.

Using a qualitative approach, the researcher conducted six structured face-to-face interviews with high school administrators in eastern Pennsylvania. The interviews included questions designed to fully understand the administrative investigation protocols for reported acts of bullying as well as the steps for providing consequence for confirmed acts of bullying. Participants were also given the opportunity to reflect on barriers to successful implementation of the aforementioned protocols. A follow-up was conducted with each site to collect applicable documents and artifacts to provide additional data for comparative analysis between schools.

The basis of the research is rooted in Pennsylvania School Code 24 P.S. § 13-1303.1-A entitled “Policy Relating to Bullying.” Effective July 1, 2008, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania enacted legislation that provided minimal guidelines to schools requiring the implementation or revision of existing of school board policy relative to bullying. The law states the following requirements, “[t]he policy shall delineate disciplinary consequences for bullying and may provide for prevention, intervention and education programs...[t]he policy shall identify the appropriate school staff person to receive reports of incidents of alleged bullying.” The law indicates that the policy be reviewed every three years and that the policy should be available on the website for the school entity as well as in every classroom. The law also indicates the definition for bullying to be used by schools under the law,

...“bullying” shall mean an intentional electronic, written, verbal or physical act, or a series of acts:

- (1) directed at another student or students;
 - (2) which occurs in a school setting;
 - (3) that is severe, persistent or pervasive; and
 - (4) that has the effect of doing any of the following:
 - (i) substantially interfering with a student's education;
 - (ii) creating a threatening environment; or
 - (iii) substantially disrupting the orderly operation of the school...
- ("Public School Code of 1949," 2008)

With these minimal guidelines, school districts are left to develop policies and procedures to address the bullying issues prevalent in schools. Schools are often given large

amounts of “local control,” a term to indicate that the local school entity, knowing its students most closely, is best served to make policy decisions for the district (Simonson, 2015). While local control is often touted as an important tenet of modern public education, to combat the national epidemic of bullying (Jones & Augustine, 2015), perhaps a more unified approach is warranted, a topic this research looks to explore.

The participants involved in the study were all certified high school administrators in eastern Pennsylvania. The researcher contacted all superintendents in a four-county area seeking permission to conduct research with their respective administrators. When superintendents provided permission, all high school administrators from said district were invited to be part of the study. The first six respondents from different districts were included to participate in the study. As a result, the researcher utilized participants from three counties and a variety of school demographics providing diversity to the participant pool and resulting data.

By understanding the experience of the administrators involved, the research results may result in the following:

- Influence school boards in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to amend policies relating to bullying;
- Influence principal preparation programs to adjust education programming regarding bullying;
- Provide administrators with information regarding the current state of bullying in their region;
- Encourage administrators and school boards to consider unified protocols and procedures relative to bullying and other peer-to-peer infractions;

- Influence administrators at all levels to be reflective in their practices relative to bullying;
- Encourage administrators and school boards to consider the implementation of school-wide anti-bullying or positive behavior programs;
- Inform school administrators of challenges and barriers to implementation for efficient bullying prevention in an effort to eliminate such barriers;
- Sustain a focus on student health, safety, and welfare in schools.

The results may also provide critical information as schools look to refine their processes and procedures as they relate to bullying. Districts may use the included data to identify factors that may both improve and inhibit their protocols, which could influence professional development for administrators. The results will add to the existing body of literature on bullying, bullying prevention, and administrative responses to bullying in high schools.

Research Questions

The central question of this study was: what is the administrative experience in responding to reported bullying incidents at the high school level? The assumption was that, due to the vague nature of the bullying legislation, schools would have a varied and diverse response to both investigation and application of consequence for reported incidents of bullying. Additional questions tangential to the central question focused on the two elements mentioned herein, the method by which administrators investigate bullying and the manner in which administrators provide consequence for confirmed acts of bullying. The final related research question sought to identify areas challenges and

barriers to successful implementation of existing protocols. The sub-questions included the following:

- What is the system utilized by high school administrators when investigating reported incidents of bullying?
- What is the system utilized by high school administrators when disciplining confirmed incidents of bullying?
- What challenges do high school administrators face when investigating and administering consequence for incidents of bullying?

Structured face-to-face interviews provided large amounts of data to answer the research questions. The interviews provided an opportunity for administrators to share their processes and procedures and the challenges they face in the course of their actions to address bullying. The researcher also conducted a comparative document analysis to look for consistencies and inconsistencies throughout the studied schools relative to published policies, protocols, and procedures. The document analysis, along with the answers to the sub-questions, and the additional information provided by the administrators through anecdotes help to answer the central research question of this study.

Research Streams

There were three research streams that provided motivation for this study. These included exploring the seriousness and prevalence of bullying, understanding stakeholder perceptions on the topic of bullying, and exploring the role the principal has in establishing a positive school climate and culture. Stakeholder perceptions are critical to the research due to the subjective nature of discipline in a high school setting.

Administrators must make judgments about what behavior is and is not a violation of policy and codes of conduct. Knowing the mental models and perceptions of stakeholders relating to bullying is important as these perceptions may have an influence on the outcome of an administrative investigation. The last stream focuses on the principal's impact on school climate and culture. As the instructional leader of the building, the principal has the authority to set a focus for the school, determine what will and will not receive financial and intellectual support, and therefore set a course for setting the tone and climate of the building. If a principal feels passionately about implementing positive behavior programming or anti-bullying curricula, then he or she can have a significant impact on the state of bullying in the building (Jones & Augustine, 2015). Such outcomes are critical to this study as the researcher explores administrative responses to bullying at the high school level. The results presented in this chapter are motivated by these research streams, are designed to address the research questions and provide findings to inform the various interested constituencies.

Population

The participants involved in the study were all certified high school administrators in eastern Pennsylvania holding certificates as a K-12 Principal issued by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. To select the participants, the researcher contacted all superintendents in a four-county area seeking permission to conduct research with their respective high school administrators. Once the superintendent provided permission, the high school administrators from the district were invited to be part of the study. To select the final participants, the researcher utilized the first six respondents from different districts to participate in the structured interview and

document collection.

The participants varied in age from 37 years old to 56 years old with a mean age of 46.3 years. Of the six participants, four were male and two were female. All participants were educated at the master's degree level or higher. Five of the six participants had obtained additional university credits beyond a master's degree including one who has completed a doctoral degree in education. The participants represented a wide range of experience as a high school administrator; three participants had one year of experience, one individual had three years of experience, and two participants each had eleven years of experience as a high school administrator.

The schools involved in the study had enrollments ranging from 500 to 3200 students. The participating schools all received 2014-2015 School Performance Profile (SPP) scores, a 100-point measure of student achievement issued by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, ranging from the low 60% range to the high 80% range. Though schools are able to score greater than the 100-point measure by earning extra credit with advanced scores on certain measures of student achievement, no schools in this study scored higher than 100. More specific scores cannot be published; such specificity would clearly identify the participating schools in the study. The mean SPP score for all six schools was 74.9 with a median score of 78.3. The statewide mean SPP for the 2014-15 school year was 76.9 across all 560 high schools in the state. Therefore, four of six schools participating in the study scored higher than the state mean and two schools scored lower than the mean.

Methods

The researcher used a qualitative approach to answer the research questions of the

study. The six participants were interviewed in a face-to-face setting for approximately one hour each. The participants answered open-ended interview questions related to the central research question and the sub-questions stated herein. Participants were asked to share their experience in conducting investigations related to bullying as well as their experience providing consequence for confirmed acts of bullying within their schools. Lastly, administrators were given the opportunity to reflect on challenges or barriers to their current practice. The interviews were designed to understand the totality of the administrative experience with regards to bullying. The researcher then used Dedoose coding software to sort the data and identify emerging themes. The resulting data represented the administrative experience in investigating and issuing consequence for bullying in each respective high school. In order to compare schools through formalized school board policy and procedure, a second methodology was employed.

A second qualitative measure was used to compare the policies and procedures of the participating schools. An artifact analysis was conducted, again using Dedoose software to sort and code, using policies, procedures, and student handbooks/codes of conduct. The result of the artifact analysis will help to provide additional clarity and detail to the experience findings discovered through the structured interview process. The data collected from the artifact analysis assists in establishing what is a required act on behalf of the administrator and what is an act of administrative discretion. In addition, the documents indicate the extent to which districts are compliant with the specifics of the bullying law, many of which are policy or procedural requirements.

Findings

Qualitative Measure: Structured Interview

In order to understand the experience of the administrators, it is best to understand the systems and resources each administrator has at his or her disposal in order to frame a clear understanding of actions. The following sections describe the systemic structures in place within participating schools. These structures are the practices, policies, and procedures which help frame the decision making process for participating administrators.

Use of research based positive behavior or anti-bullying program.

The first notable finding is that none of the participating schools are using a research-based positive behavior support program or anti-bullying curriculum in their schools. Four of the schools use locally developed programming to address the problem of bullying in the schools leaving two schools that do not have any programming whatsoever to address bullying in the school. A breakdown of the programming can be seen in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Anti-bullying programming in participant schools

Participant	Research-based programming; fully implemented	Program is comprehensive in nature	Locally developed programming	Uses elements of research-based models	No programming
1			X	X	
2			X	X	
3		X	X	X	
4					X
5					X
6			X		

Of the four, one school (participant six) uses their ninth grade transition programming to address bullying and provide students with techniques for dealing with bullying behaviors in school. However, only three of the thirteen sessions are devoted to anti-bullying themes. In addition, these sessions are peer-mediated, rather than mediated by trained adults. Participant two uses components of the well-known Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (Olweus & Limber, 2010). The participant stated, “[w]e sort of utilize Olweus...but not fully. We have the books and the manuals and we utilize some of what they talk about or what they teach but then we also have a separate spin on things as well.” Participants one and three use elements of Restorative Practices (RP) (Wachtel, 2013) as part of their disciplinary processes; RP is designed for students to understand how their behaviors affect not just their victims, but also their community. This is not, however, anti-bullying or school wide positive behavior programming, it is rooted in restorative justice and community building.

Only participant three described ongoing, multi-level, comprehensive, locally initiated programming implemented at the school. The program is in its third year; it started at the high school and is now delivered at all levels within the district. Additionally, the anti-bullying programming initiative is part of the district comprehensive planning process submitted to the state department of education as a component of long-term planning. Participant three described the program in this way,

Our whole goal is to create an awareness for students of what bullying and harassment is, and not only that, but giving students an avenue, resources, of what to take if it is happening to them. The gist of our motto is [to] tell someone and get some help if someone is making you feel uncomfortable or unwanted or things

along those lines.

The administrator has created a student steering committee that meets twice per month, visits elementary schools, and evaluates programming options including guest speakers. The group also helped to develop anonymous reporting procedures that are critical to the investigation process to be discussed later. The group advocates that students stand up to bullying and harassment and not be bystanders for such conduct. Participant three uses the Restorative Practices model as described above to restore the broken school community when an incident of bullying has occurred.

Administrative training on bullying.

When the participants were asked to reflect on training they received specific to bullying, only one administrator, participant three, indicated that administrators receive ongoing training as a part of the anti-bullying program indicated in the school comprehensive plan. Of the remaining participants, participant two indicated that focus has shifted away from their anti-bullying programs; as a result, the trainings for administrators have also dwindled. Participant two stated,

The past couple of years that this has been an initiative, there has been training over the summer and in the fall. To be honest it is sort of decreased each year. It was an initiative to start and everybody was very excited about it and we had a lot of the kick offs. We had an event here in our gymnasium with the students. We have speakers that come in that talk about doing the right thing, not bullying.

There has been some training; it has probably decreased a little bit as the program has moved forward.

One participant (number six) sought out training within the prior twelve months to attend

a half-day seminar presented by a local law firm on bullying. The participant indicated that she was the only participant from her district in attendance at the seminar. The remaining participants, three of the six, report they have not received any in-service training on bullying at any point in time in their administrative careers. To better understand what sort of training administrators may have received throughout their administrative training and experience, the participants were asked to reflect on what sort of bullying training or exposure to anti-bullying programs or curricula they received in their principal preparation programs prior to serving in administrative capacities. The participants responded unanimously that none of them, zero participants, recall receiving any training relative to bullying whatsoever in their respective principal preparation programs.

With the background of each participant more clearly known, the process and procedures used to investigate acts of bullying, relevant to research sub-question one, can now be explored.

Participant definitions of bullying.

Participating administrators were asked to describe how they define the act of bullying. This is critically important because the reported act must meet the administrator's minimum threshold for violation to result in action under the bullying law and resulting district policy and procedure. When asked how they define the act of bullying, the participants answered with similar characteristics, though varying definitions, as indicated in Table 4.2. As an open-ended question, participants were able to answer as they saw fit; as such, there are many components represented in Table 4.2 where one or two administrators expresses a component of bullying where others were

silent on the same component.

An indication of “no” in the table indicates that the participant specifically stated this behavior was not part of his or her definition. Blank spaces indicate the participant was silent on the component area without indication of a positive or negative indicator.

Table 4.2

Participant definitions of bullying

Participant	Behavior is repeated	Behavior is severe	Prolonged/over a period of time	Victim feels significantly unsafe	Impacts learning	Continues after being addressed by admin	Occurs one time
1	X	X	X				MAYBE
2	X		X				NO
3	X		X				NO
4	X		X				
5	X		X			X	
6	X			X	X		

Certainly, themes emerge from the responses from the participants, most notably that in order to be classified as bullying the behavior must be repeated (indicated by all six participants) and that the behavior is prolonged or happens over a period of time (indicated by five of six participants). The table indicates a response of “maybe” for participant one relative to whether or not a single act can constitute bullying. The participant stated, “[bullying] isn’t something that is a one-time offense. A one time offense could be [bullying], depends on again, the devil is in the details, is it something that has been prolonged, sustained over a period of time?” Indicating that repeated behavior over a period of time is clearly an act of bullying, while a one-time issue “could be” considered bullying but is not always considered as such.

To ensure participants were able to share all components they felt indicated a violation of bullying policy, they were asked a follow-up question, to describe what distinguishing factors help the administrator to determine if an act is one of bullying or other inappropriate behavior. These results are represented in Table 4.3. The results, though similar, indicate beliefs not represented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.3

Factors participants use to distinguish bullying vs. other conduct violations

Participant	Behavior is repeated	Behavior is severe	Prolonged/ over a period of time	Victim feels significantly unsafe	Impacts learning	Continues after being addressed by admin	Occurs one time	Power imbalance	Intent of the alleged perpetrator
1	X	X	X				MAYBE		
2	X		X				NO		
3	X		X				NO	X	
4	X		X	X					
5	X		X	X		X			X
6	X	X		X	X				

The changes in response are indicated in areas of victims feeling unsafe, the requirement of a power imbalance, the severity of the act, and the intent of the alleged perpetrator all saw new indications upon follow-up with the participants. Ultimately, most of the participants indicated such a determination was a judgment and an application of administrative discretion considering factors such as severity, repetition, and the prolonged nature of the behavior. The responses to the two interview questions asking administrators to delineate between bullying and other behaviors help to indicate a robust picture of what helps administrators determine when and how to proceed with a reported bullying incident.

Investigative practices.

Once faced with a report of bullying, all of the participating administrators conduct an investigation into the report. No participants described that they were required either by policy, regulation, or protocol to follow a standard practice when investigating reported acts of bullying. Only one participant, number three, used a consistent protocol when investigating reported acts of bullying, but the protocol was one he created and not required by policy. Participants utilized a similar series of steps ranging from a series of six steps of investigation up to nine steps of investigation. The steps each participant takes when investigating reported acts of bullying are listed in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

Participant investigation protocols for reported bullying

Participant	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7	Step 8	Step 9
1	interview victim	take written statement from victim	interview witnesses	interview alleged perpetrator	collate facts, make determination of policy violation	issue consequence as necessary	begin restorative steps		
2	interview victim	take written statement from victim	<p> speak with guidance counselor, give victim access to counselor </p>	interview alleged perpetrator	take written statement from alleged perpetrator	interview witnesses	take written statement from witnesses	collate facts, make determination of policy violation	issue consequence as necessary
3	interview victim	take written statement from victim	interview witnesses	take written statements from witnesses	interview alleged perpetrator	collate facts, make determination of policy violation	parental notification of both victim and alleged perpetrator	issue consequence as necessary	begin restorative steps
4	take written statement from victim	interview witnesses	take written statements from witnesses	interview alleged perpetrator	take written statement from alleged perpetrator	collate facts, make determination of policy violation	contact school resource officer to share information	issue consequence as necessary	
5	interview victim	interview witnesses	interview teachers if they have any knowledge of the situation	contact parents of the victim and notify of ongoing investigation	interview alleged perpetrator	collect written statements from victim, witnesses, teachers, and alleged perpetrator	collate facts, make determination of policy violation	contact parents of alleged perpetrator, notify of consequence	contact local law enforcement as necessary
6	interview victim	contact parents of the victim to gather additional relevant facts	interview witnesses	contact school resource officer to share information	interview alleged perpetrator	collate facts, make determination of policy violation	issue consequence as necessary		

Importance of patterns in behavior.

When conducting interviews, four participants, one, two, three, and four, are interested in understanding patterns present in the offending behavior. The administrators indicated such information was important for planning intervention strategies to mitigate the behavior. Participant two recollected that many of the incidents he investigates occur in unstructured time during the school day. Knowing the specific locations and times of the offending behavior helps to station adults in the area and be proactive. Participant two states, “[w]e would collect the location, we would collect what time. Usually [bullying incidents] are in unstructured times, so it might be in the hallway or the cafeteria, we try to be as specific as possible.” Participant three elaborated on this topic as well. The participant stated,

...what I try to do is if I find a common location things are happening, I will check to see what support I have there as far as teachers, adults, that kind of thing. If I have three reports where there's an issue out on the bus loading area, I am going to get someone else out there to supervise that area. I will go out and be more of a presence out there; those kinds of things. I just look for those kinds of themes and tendencies, just to be proactive...educating students and being proactive I think are the two biggest plusses an administrator could have...

Participant two recollected that many of the incidents he investigates occur in unstructured time during the school day. Knowing the specific locations and times of the offending behavior helps to station adults in the area and be proactive. Participant two stated, “[w]e would collect the location, we would collect what time. Usually [bullying incidents] are in unstructured times, so it might be in the hallway or the cafeteria, we try

to be as specific as possible.”

In addition to the patterns of behavior, three participants, four, five, and six, all ensure they understand the historical context of the behavior between the victim and offender when conducting the interviews of victims, witnesses, and alleged perpetrators. This information helps the administrator determine whether the behavior is persistent as well as provide context relative to the nature of the conflict and the nature of those involved. Participant six described the investigative step as follows:

We will always go back to the middle school, or previous years, and look at previous disciplining, if this is a pattern of accusations, unfounded accusations, or if it is a repeated pattern of truthful accusations. We tend to go back at least a year, possibly two, to see if this is something that has occurred for a while and usually talk to the assistant principal of the middle school, but definitely a review of discipline records in our staff or our system, student information system. Then, talking to the counselors and other, previous counselors and previous administrators.

Participant five provided a similar desire to collect historical context to the bullying situation. He reported the importance of the information as such:

I do ask them is this the first time that this has ever happened? Is this a situation where in prior years the same people you feel have been picking on you because I might not have the history behind it. Then, I can go back and try to inquire a little bit of what has gone on. If it is someone who was already into our school system, we can call down to the middle school and talk to administration there, or guidance counselors, and find out what has happened in the past.

Administrative reflections on how investigative protocols are successful.

Administrators were asked to reflect on how their investigation protocols were successful in helping address the issue of bullying in their respective schools. Many indicated their process of taking all reports seriously and providing support to the student victim as necessary to provide relief. Table 4.5 provides administrative feedback relative to this topic.

Table 4.5:

Participant reflections on how their investigation protocols help to address bullying in their respective school

Participant Number	Participant Response
1	<p>"I care. It's one of those times where I think it is appropriate to put on your parent hat and I have three children. I want to remove as many possible barriers to the kid's education. There are a lot of things that I cannot control, and something that I can control is doing the confines of our house, during the hours of our house, as I like to call it, is that I would not want that for my own kids. I do not do well with just mean spirited, unkind people. To me, it is an injustice, so I get after it. I do not perpetuate it back to the perpetrator, if it is accurate, but I take it very seriously because I do not like it. Personal pet peeve of mine, if you will, and I want to correct it. Not that I harass and shame the other person, the perpetrator, but I want to root out and correct that view because</p>

	<p>one day, that person is going to have a significant other, have kids, or what not. I'm not saying a one time conversation, discipline, is going to cure somebody, but our whole society has swung more towards not being as civil, and I do not like that.”</p>
2	<p>“I do think that it has increased the awareness of what has been going on in this school. I think that before we had the program [use of Olweus tools] that it would not be something where they would write a discipline referral for, it is not something that a lot of times happened right in front of them. I think that it has increased school wide the amount of people who are looking for it, who are trying to address it. I think it has been positive in that retrospect in basically being aware of what is going on.”</p>
3	<p>“The greatest piece of evidence that I go by is does it reoccur or not? That folder I briefly showed you, if there are 30 cases in there, maybe one is reoccurring. Using the restorative approach and having students take accountability, for not only what they do but what they say, goes a long way. Getting them involved in the restorative piece for us, getting them involved in that whole process helps. I can not tell you enough how many times a student who has felt they were bullied in elementary or middle school, come to the high school and now they are on the other side of that spectrum. They are someone that has yelled at someone, or has harassed, or picked on, or made fun of someone. When you kind</p>

	of break down the layers of it and you talk through it, that person will say, 'Man, I can't believe I did that because now I remember how I felt when it was done towards me.'"
4	"I think that the viewpoint from the student's perspective is that it is handled very seriously. I think the student says, 'Hey you have to take that to administration.' You hear kids talking about, 'Hey that could be bullying. That is serious, do not do that.' I think the message is out to the kids that we take it seriously whether it's founded or unfounded. We are an ear to hear, to investigate. Sometimes it does not go in their favor. Sometimes it does depending on the investigation. I think that is positive."
5	"The best description I can give to it is that we are trying to take one case at a time and eliminate it, but it certainly would be ideal if we had some other means of trying to get the message out that this is just not acceptable and try to get everyone to buy into it."
6	"It is very individualized, which in some cases is good, in some cases is not, because it is also not consistent, because it is really on a case-by-case basis. I do think that the message has gotten out to the students since they were young, that a lot of stuff is bullying when in fact it is not, and so there is a lot of groundwork to be covered with the kids after the investigation is done, to explain why this is or is not classified as bullying. A lot of times the kids are very frustrated, because in their mind it is, but it does

	not adhere to the guidelines that our district has set out that classify something as bullying.”
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Disciplinary practices for first time violators of bullying policy.

Administrators were subsequently asked to reflect on the disciplinary practices present at their schools relative to bullying. From the outset, it was clear that the disciplinary approaches varied widely from school to school. Administrators were asked to share the prescribed discipline for first-time offenders when the student was found in violation of the bullying policy. The consequences ranged from an administrative warning through out of school suspension. The results are available in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6

Prescribed minimum discipline for first-time violations of bullying policy

Participant	Prescribed discipline	No prescribed discipline	Administrative warning	Phone call home	Letter of apology	Participation in restorative meeting	After school detention	Saturday morning extended detention	Out of school suspension	Police Notification
1		X					X+	(X+)	(X)	
2		X	X	X			(X)			
3		X			X	X		X	(X)	
4	X								X	X
5	X								X	
6	X								X	

X+ = consequence calls for multiple applications of the discipline, i.e. multiple detentions

(X) = consequence is indicated as a possibility based on administrative discretion

As indicated in Table 4.6, when administrators are given the freedom to apply discretion to the disciplinary process, the outcome is widely disparate with other participants. In the three schools, four, five, and six, where discipline is prescribed, there appears to be unity among the disciplinary outcomes.

Participant one is not held to and prescribed discipline as noted in the student handbook. Therefore, administrative discretion is broadly applied when issuing consequence for bullying. Participant one indicated that, generally speaking, a student found in violation of the bullying policy would receive between three and five days of after school detentions at a length of 30 minutes each or one Saturday detention at a length of 3 hours. If the student does not “accept responsibility for the behavior,” the administrator would consider assigning two Saturday morning detentions to the student and if the behavior is “severe or violent” then the student could be suspended out of school.

Participant two does not have prescribed discipline in the student code of conduct; therefore administrative discretion is applied as well. The minimum consequence is an administrative warning, and phone call home, with the added possibility of an after school detention at a length of 90 minutes. Any additional application of discipline would be a matter of administrative discretion.

Similarly, participant three does not have and prescribed discipline in the student code of conduct, therefore administrative discretion is applied to the disciplinary process. The minimum consequence the administrator would give is a four-hour Saturday morning detention. In addition, the student found responsible for bullying would have to write a letter of apology to the victim and participate in a restorative meeting with the victim.

According to participant three, depending on the circumstances, a student could be issued a maximum consequence of an out of school suspension for a first time offense.

Participants four and six have prescribed discipline in the code of conduct; therefore the administrator does not apply discretion in the issuance of consequences. Participant four issues a three-hour Saturday morning detention and makes notification to local law enforcement through the school resource officer (SRO). Participant six issues a three-day out of school suspension if a student is found in violation of the bullying policy.

Participant five does have a prescribed disciplinary action in the code of conduct, but the administrator still narrowly applies discretion. If a student is found in violation of the bullying policy, the student receives 1-3 days of out of school suspension. The assigning administrator determines the length of suspension.

Discipline for repeat violators of bullying policy.

Administrators were also asked to share the prescribed discipline for repeat offenders of the bullying policy. While there was more unity noted in responses relative to the responses for first-time offenders, schools that do not have prescribed discipline in the student code of conduct can vary widely in their application of consequence for prohibited behavior. However, it should be noted that all schools employ progressive discipline where the infraction for a subsequent violation will be greater than the prior infraction. Five of the six administrators indicated that out of school suspension was the likely outcome if a student was found in repeat violation of the policy. The only deviation from this trend was by participant two who stated that the likely outcome could result in discipline as mild as multiple detentions. Given the scenario that a student was a

repeat offender of the bullying policy, the administrators provided likely outcomes as found in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7

Prescribed discipline for subsequent violations of bullying policy

Participant	Prescribed discipline	No prescribed discipline	Progressive in nature	Required parent meeting	After school detention	Saturday morning extended detention	In school suspension	Out of school suspension	Police Notification
1		X	X					X	
2		X	X		X+	(X)	(X)		
3		X	X	X				X	
4	X		X					X	X
5	X		X					X	
6	X		X					X	

X+ = consequence calls for multiple applications of the discipline, i.e. multiple detentions

(X) = consequence is indicated as a possibility based on administrative discretion

The data in Table 4.7 shows a much closer alignment than was found in Table 4.6.

Participant one reflected that the likely suspension for a repeat offender would range from three to ten days, the length to be determined by the assigning administrator.

Participant two is a clear outlier to the remaining participants. There is no prescribed discipline in the student code of conduct, therefore administrative discretion is applied. Participant two reflected that the likely outcome as follows, “if there are repeat offenders, that [initial] detention might turn into two or three detentions, it might turn in to a Saturday detention, or it could end up being an in-school suspension scenario.”

While the remaining participants issue some form of out of school suspension at this level, participant two is issuing multiple after school detentions.

As indicated, the remainder of participants issue out of school suspension of varying lengths for varying reasons using prescribed discipline as noted. Participant three indicated the length of suspension is based on severity of the most recent infraction. Participant four stated that if a student is found in repeat violation of the bullying policy, the student receives a 5-10 day out of school suspension and local law enforcement are notified through the SRO. The assigning administrator determines the length of suspension. Participant five has a similar outcome for repeat offenders. The participant said that if a student is found in repeat violation of the bullying policy, the student receives a 4-10 day out of school suspension. The assigning administrator determines the length of suspension. Lastly, Participant six issues discipline in accordance with the prescribed discipline in the code of conduct. If a student is found in repeat violation of the bullying policy with participant six, the student receives 5 days of out of school suspension.

The results found in Table 4.7 seem to indicate a curious outlier in participant two because of the mild nature of the consequence, especially when the remainder of participating administrators, even with complete discretion, see the likely outcome as an infraction deserving of out of school suspension. However, participant four made an interesting and enlightening comment asked to elaborate on his application of administrative discretion which may help to explain the disparity found in Table 4.7. When addressing an issue of bullying that results in injury to the victim, participant four “may or may not” use the bullying disciplinary designation. The participant said,

In terms of injuries, sometimes we do not just use the bullying code. We can also do an assault [code] or we can add disorderly conduct [code] or we can add other violations of code as well... everything I investigate there is always a finding of something. It is, “what are we looking for?” Are we looking for the bullying or are we looking for an inappropriate behavior that caused a discomfort to somebody else that may have crossed the line into a totally different category? Sometimes I investigate bullying and it is not bullying but I am still holding another child accountable for [another violation].

Thus, the administrator will often times consider the behaviors and associated consequence(s) accordingly. Since bullying behaviors may also be violations of other areas of the code of conduct, such as assault, fighting, hitting, kicking, or general misconduct, there are times when bullying may not be selected as the infraction but rather a more benign, or more severe, infraction. Such a phenomenon may account for the spread of responses in Table 4.7. Participant five echoed these sentiments when he discussed deviating from the prescribed disciplinary actions, “There is...is it teasing and

taunting, versus bullying, versus harassment at different levels and different directions in terms of sexual harassment as opposed to physical altercations and so forth.” The administrator indicated that a higher degree infraction could supersede the bullying designation when working through an incident.

Involvement of local law enforcement in discipline.

There was also discrepancy in the manner in which administrators will contact local law enforcement. In schools with a school resource officer (SRO), as seen in participants one, four, and six, the administrator was likely to involve the SRO in an outreach capacity to share information and to keep the SRO abreast of the happenings within the school. Participant one describes the relationship as such,

If we see that a situation is not going to end or students are not committed to being safe, we have [contacted the SRO]. It may not even be anything as far as that they are going to do an arrest, it is just that now, everybody is on the same page. Now, [the SRO has] a name to a face, along with this situation incident.

Participant six reflected positively on the involvement of the SRO within the school and the outreach he conducts. She said,

If there is something to [the bullying report], after speaking with the kids or a parent, I will always call the police officer in. We have a very proactive SRO here at this school, and he is involved in a whole lot more than my previous school, my previous SROs would be involved if there [was] a knife or weapons or drugs, or anything like that. Bullying, not so much, unless it ended in a fight. Here, at this school, the SRO is extremely proactive, works with the students all the way through their educational career, so he knows them very well. He knows the

families, and so that is a huge asset. His presence is a huge asset, but also his history with the students is also very important. I think just his presence alone adds to the impact, and the seriousness of the conversation.

Comparatively speaking, the schools that do not employ a school resource officer, as seen with participants two, three, and five, offer more pause and hesitation before contacting local law enforcement relative to bullying issues. Participant five, when asked if he involves local law enforcement only if he feels a law has been broken, indicated, “right. It's the State Police jurisdiction in this area, so they are called. Again, they sometimes make the decision as to whether or not there is any type of citation that is issued.” Thus, there is less coordination noted between schools without school resource officers than those that employ an SRO at the school.

Administrative reflections on how disciplinary protocols are successful.

Participants were again asked to reflect on the way in which they believed their disciplinary practices were successful in helping to address the issue of bullying in their respective schools. The responses to the prompt are found in Table 4.8. Participants were quick to indicate that behaviors typically did not repeat after addressing with discipline, but that otherwise it was difficult to equate the implementation of consequences as helping stem broader issue of bullying.

Table 4.8

Participant reflections on how their disciplinary practices help to address bullying in their respective school

Participant Number	Participant Response
1	<p>“It is very rare for there to be a second offense. I think kids really quickly...we put them through the process. They quickly find out, it is not going to be tolerated here at all. I am struggling during right now, during our conversation, to even tell you how I had a repeat offender. I am appreciative of that. They may be out of the school, and may be they do not come and tell us, but as far that, I would like to know during our hours and times, that once we handle it initially, it is rare.”</p>
2	<p>“I think that it is important to first of all identify what has been going on, and then second of all I think discipline is a part of trying to get the student to change their behavior. Some students, it does not matter how many detentions you give to them; they are not going to change their behavior. The idea is to try to bring enough people in, involve as many of the stakeholders if you will, the parents and the guidance counselors and the assistant principals and possibly the principals that the student will change his or her behavior to fix it. I think discipline plays a part in it, I mean [it is] never perfect.”</p>
3	<p>“I stated earlier about this, having these incidences not reoccur,</p>

	<p>but it's just talking to the students afterwards. Checking up with them, the follow through. Asking them did they feel comfortable with [the process]...And a lot of them will give you feedback and say the way [the process is organized] helps them kind of organize their thoughts, which is big.”</p>
4	<p>“I do not know. I do not know if there's any data to support that. We talk about the bullying policies at the very beginning of the year. Until it happens, I guess the kids are kind of like ‘yeah okay.’ Then if they see it happen to somebody they realize ‘oh they are serious.’ I think that deters quite a bit. Does it work a hundred percent? Absolutely not. You are going to have it no matter what. There is always a better plan to make things better.”</p>
5	<p>“I do believe for those students who have broken the rule and have been engaging in bullying that we have not had repeat offenders. However, I think also once something occurs, again it is small school in a small town, it does not take much for kids to know what is going on in everybody else's life that if somebody is disciplined they know right away that things are taken seriously and that it is not going to be accepted. Of course it is not just word-of-mouth, it is that social media once they get out of school that they communicate that back and forth.”</p>
6	<p>“I think it brings awareness, and it reinforces the seriousness of the subject, and the fact that we take it seriously. I do not know</p>

	<p>how much it changes behaviors, and that is where I try to bring in more of the restorative practice type of repairing the relationship, and owning, taking responsibility for actions. That is not part of our code of conduct, that is just part of me, I do not think ... I think our assemblies and our lessons, like in the freshman academy, I think they are very impactful, but the discipline itself, the punitive end of things, although it is necessary because there must be consequences for students' actions, I do not know if that changes behavior much. It gets the word out that we're not going to put up with the behavior, but I do not know if it changed the behavior."</p>
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Administrative reflections on challenges to investigation practices.

After reflecting on the investigation practices and the disciplinary practices with their schools, the participants were asked to reflect on challenges they face in implementing each area within their duties as administrator. The responses, extremely personal views on the barriers and challenges to successful practices, are candid and illustrate the multifaceted nature of bullying claims.

Relative to the investigation process, the administrators were surprisingly aligned in their responses. Many indicated that it is difficult to elicit honest responses from students when investigating claims of bullying. Students will often lie to either protect themselves or their friends from potential consequence, making the investigation and distillation of facts a difficult task. Additionally, participants reflected on the difficult

nature of parents who are looking to protect their child from the potential harm that severe discipline could create. Participant six stated that she has had circumstances where the parent sent an attorney into school to prevent the child from even meeting with an investigating administrator. She said, parents have become very protective and will impede the investigative process. She said, “a lot of times they will put roadblocks up, send lawyers in or they will come in, or forbid their child to speak with us any further.” Such pressures have even resulted in a deviation of protocols to eliminate the threat of potential litigation. The administrator reflections are available in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9

Participant reflections on challenges faced when investigating reported acts of bullying

Participant Number	Participant Response
1	<p>“You know you would think that there is this street code of just being silent, keeping your mouth shut, but really it all comes down to relationships, and we know that. You build a reputation of value of work that you can be trusted. Someone's not going to put you out there so to speak, that kids give you information because deep down somewhere, they do not like what's going on. They want this place to be safe. They know they are the number one people (<i>sic</i>) who will keep themselves safe, and our school safe by giving us an opening to the information. To answer your question, I have the opportunity from a varying standpoint, it just how I pursue the information. If someone wanted to be honest</p>

	with the information, without that type of information, it kind of makes or breaks what you are trying to do.”
2	<p>“I think the number one challenge is the idea of the denial from the accused that it is bullying. We will get anywhere from “oh they are my friend, oh they just interpreted it the wrong way, and you do not understand, this is not true it just looks this way.”</p> <p>There is a lot of that, and a lot of push back from parents when you use that word. They will say that my son or daughter is not a bully, this would never happen, what are you doing, this is completely made up. Also, I think on the other end, like I said before you will have parents that call and say ‘my son or daughter is being bullied.’ We say ‘okay what is the name [of the offender]’, [and they will say] ‘well I don't want to give that because they are going to continue to get bullied if I do that. You cannot share this information.’ That makes it difficult.”</p>
3	<p>“I think the challenges that I face ... is not that students have changed at all, but they will sit there and they can look straight in your eye and lie to you. They are masters at it. I think the challenge is making sure that you are overturning every stone, you are talking to everyone you need to talk to. You got to look for consistency there, because another challenge is you will have parents that will come in and defend their kids. They will defend their kid to the [end] and think there is nothing wrong with their</p>

	<p>behavior or what they did. Not a lot of times, but there are times I have to say, ‘What you might find acceptable at home is not acceptable here.’ But it is getting the facts, the true facts. Getting that all taken care of. A lot of kids do not want to ‘narc’ on each other, even though we get to this point, they do not want to throw each other under the bus. They do not want to get each other in trouble, so you got to kind of work through that. ‘Yeah, I am not a snitch,’ how many times do you hear that? But that is a challenge. We are in a good district, but some times parents will come in and they want to defend their child even though their child is in the wrong. That is a challenge.</p> <p>The other big thing is the follow-up to make sure, make sure they are getting the right resources that they need. But that is difficult because there are times that I just could not do it. I will follow up, and they will be like, ‘That was like 3 months ago.’ And I'm like, ‘I know, but I care and I just want to follow up with you,’ that kind of thing. I believe that is a challenge. You follow up with everyone involved in the situation, and we are in a good place, and we have helped, we have moved on and things are where they need to be.”</p>
4	<p>“There is no clear direction by the law as to what really...I mean I know it says persistent. I know it says pervasive. What does that</p>

mean? There is a little bit of uncertainty about that.

Some of the other challenges that I have is where do you draw the line where it is a school issue versus a parent issue? Something is happening on a Saturday evening at home, and Monday morning I come in here and the parent is waiting at the door saying 'Hey this is what my kid received on his, [social media]' I said, 'Well why did you not just call the police?' There are challenges as far as where do you cross that line between a school issue versus a parent/community issue.

The other challenge I have is we are a very small school.

Sometimes a lot of kids are afraid to talk. A lot of kids will be like, 'I do not know anything. If you want to check, I have nothing on my phone. I have nothing on my computer.' I have heard things, but I really do not. They know how I work. I do not care what you heard. What did you see? What do you know? That is the approach I take. Bigger schools would probably be easier because you can hide. [At a small school] Everybody knows everybody. I try very carefully when I interview kids. I assure them, this is as confidential as it can be to a limit. There is sometimes where I might have to violate that if it is legal. If it is safety. If it is stuff like that. The kids know that. I think sometimes you get a few that, you know, "I do not know anything."

5	<p>“Sometimes it is getting the truth. That is a definite challenge. Students are told it is a lot easier if they tell us the truth up front than if they drag us through hours and hours until eventually the truth comes out. That is probably the biggest one. Sometimes it is cooperation on parents’ parts. Again, more so the offender’s side, ‘not my child,’ or they will come back and they will say something like, ‘What did the other kid do?’ That is definitely a challenge.”</p>
6	<p>“The phones and the electronics and the social media are killing us. They are just drowning us, the stuff that the kids are putting out there. That could be a full time job, is investigating social media threats and bullying and “he said/she said” on that. Parents become very protective, and once they are notified that a student has been called into the office, a lot of times they will put roadblocks up, send lawyers in or they will come in, or forbid their child to speak with us any further. That is obviously a huge roadblock.</p> <p>Teenagers are teenagers, and they lie, which slows things down a little bit... and I do find that the administration in general, of this district, not necessarily the high school but just in general, tend to cower or kowtow to the parents' wishes, and so the parents have a lot more power than they necessarily should or what's good for the kids. A lot of times, decisions are made to just end the</p>

	situation rather than deal with the situation. Which can be a barrier to giving the appropriate consequences after the facts have been found. A lot of times it is just easier to make it go away than do what needs to be done.”
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The challenges faced when issuing consequences for confirmed acts of bullying are similar in nature. Participants reflected that parents are often difficult when issuing consequence to the child, challenging the administrative stance on the issue.

Administrative reflections on challenges to disciplinary practices.

Additionally, participants found that balancing discipline with education was a challenge to the disciplinary process, issuing the appropriate amount of discipline to deter future acts while still providing an educational opportunity to learn and allow the student time for metacognition and personal growth. Complete responses can be found in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10

Participant reflections on challenges faced when disciplining for confirmed acts of bullying

Participant Number	Participant Response
1	“We try to keep our own biases and subjectivism [from getting] in the way, because we rope in one of our colleagues, at least I like to do that a lot, and say, ‘look, here are the facts, here is the information. I want an objective set of eyes. This is what I think I

	am going to do, where I am going, you know. What are you thinking?'''
2	<p>"I think the challenge is that issuing enough discipline that the bullying will stop, that you will change the behavior but not too much where then the bully seeks retribution against the victim. They say 'oh you did this to me,' or 'you gave me these extra days of in-school suspension because you made a big deal out of nothing.' It is tough to balance that out."</p>
3	<p>"Generally I don't [face challenges]. There will be some parents that think [the discipline is] too harsh. The punishment should fit the crime. And then you take your time to explain why that consequence needed to happen, those kinds of things. But generally no, by the time we get to this point they kind of understand why they're here. At that point, when the consequences come, I think you really rinsed out the rag and gotten to a point where they know and realize what's happened, and their part in it and how they need to take responsibility for that."</p>
4	<p>"[The biggest challenge] Is convincing the parents that it is bullying because their definition begins with, 'Well it is not bullying. When we were kids, we went to the backyard and this is what we did.' That kind of stuff. 'Boys will be boys. Girls will be girls. Well it's so and so's fault.' That kind of stuff. One of the</p>

	<p>biggest challenges I have is parents agreeing with you that A) it is bullying and second of all, the consequences are appropriate for the offense. That is one of the bigger ones.</p> <p>The second is, and I have a student that has been disciplined that keeps coming back saying, 'I do not agree with you. It is not bullying. This is the definition of bullying.' They come in with fifteen pages of their definition of bullying and, 'I did not do this and this and this. Therefore your theory is out the window.' That is when I say, 'Well I could turn it over to the police and let them decide on the legal end.' That is probably the biggest challenge I have."</p>
5	<p>"We are pretty consistent as far as consequences, but again, it comes back to the human factor, where you will have a parent who will cry, 'my child cannot afford to be out of school,' or 'you better go back and reinvestigate.' They will make a comment, but it does not change the consequence, but always on those scenarios if it is more than three days, we always offer them if you want you can come in, you have an informal hearing and we will deal with this matter as far as a disciplinary hearing for the suspension itself. That is how we usually try to do it. It is usually the parents that have the issue with the discipline."</p>
6	<p>"For confirmed acts of bullying, if we include the legal aspect of things, it is a very long, drawn out process and the trials, and the</p>

	<p>trial prep, and the subpoenas, and the investigation, it is very time consuming, has nothing to do with educational leadership, although it is a necessary evil of managing a school, and dealing with students, so sometimes it is just, again, easier to make it go away and not fight the parents and not bring issues to the school board [in cases of expulsion]. Sometimes, rarely, but sometimes, things go away that should not. Special education is another huge barrier, very often our students, not all the time but very often, we have special education students who are involved in bullying, for whatever reason, but they happen to be labeled special education, and so that really ties our hands, especially if it is found to be a manifestation of their disability. Once that is thrown out there, then everything stops. Manifestation hearings take a while, if you go that route.”</p>
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Participant six highlighted issues associated with special education and students with special needs. Such a designation can limit the administrator’s ability to suspend the student, especially for behaviors determined to be a manifestation of the student’s disability. Students with disabilities are granted additional due process rights not otherwise granted to students in the regular education program (Zirkel, 1995; Zirkel & Covelle, 2009). Participant six noted that the special education processes could inhibit or limit the assignment of disciplinary consequences, thus limiting the deterrent nature of the published discipline code.

General participant reflections.

When given the opportunity to provide additional feedback relative to all aspects of the interview conducted, each participant reflected on their overall perceptions and challenges relating to enforcement of bullying policies and procedures. The anecdotes shared several themes including the notion that the word bullying is a problem.

Participant one stated, "I just think, you know, we have to be vigilant and we have to take it serious (*sic*), but we also have to educate. There is an abuse of that word, bullying."

Similarly, participant two reflected, "bullying, they just like that word now, [it is] en vogue, and it is something that people just like to use a lot. I think that has been the biggest challenge is actually identifying the actual bullying and issuing consequences for that." Other administrators found the bullying law to be frustratingly vague. Participant four spoke passionately on the issue saying,

As far the interpretations, the diversity between the different districts, the different law enforcement agencies, different people, I believe that there should be a more streamlined approach across the state, across the communities. Let's say, you have got fifteen school districts here. You are going to have fifteen different definitions. You are going to have fifteen different reactions. You are going to have fifteen different consequences and guess what? You are giving out mixed messages to the community. "Oh where I came from this was considered bullying." So I think that we are doing our [school] communit[ies] an injustice... I think we are doing an injustice because I do not think we can give a fair ... I know what we do is fair, but I do not think we can give a very consistent [response] across the line. Every other crime is pretty well defined. Speeding is speeding.

Assault is assault. Theft is theft. Possession of drugs is possession of drugs.

Bullying is the one where there's so much gray area that it needs to be cleaned up. Participant five recalled her time as a middle school teacher and administrator and how there is a clear focus on developing the person at the middle levels that is seemingly nonexistent at the high school level. The focus at the high school level is much more academic in nature and therefore, there is less time devoted to developing the person, the social development of the individual. Her experience indicated that without consistent programming at the high school level, the focus on bullying tends to dwindle over time, a observation shared by participant number two as indicated in Table 4.1 and associated discussion. Participant five said,

It would be nice to have some type of a program where we are spending the time to educate the students more and maybe some type of activities so that they understand a little bit more to be tolerant of each other's diversities and dealing with how people are different and accepting them for who they are. I am talking as a former middle school administrator and thinking about what I know from the training that we went through. What programs we had there are definitely much more accepted on the middle level. The bullying prevention and the peer mediation...when I was at the middle level, the positive behavior support...so there were lots of avenues to try to address the issue at that particular stage. The behaviors do not really change, especially in the first part of their high school career in terms of some of those behaviors. If anything, they get sneakier, so I do feel like it needs to be addressed and that there needs to be an understanding that stand up for yourself and do not let anybody put you in any kind of situation

where you are uncomfortable with what they're saying and so forth. For those who are saying it, they need to fully understand it's not going to be tolerated.

[The issue is] the resource of time. It may be a matter of making that training a priority and making sure that there's a program to sustain itself over time, because as we have these outside groups that come in, it's clearly a short term fix for a small group of students. It does not help the group at large to understand better what is going on. If it does not happen here, how do we know if when they go to college that they are not going to be in a situation where they are going to feel that they are being bullied by others?

[A focus on academics at the high school level is] a part of it. We are all going in all different directions. When you are on the middle level, you are dealing with teams and you have got that sort of bond. We have such independent schedules here that it just does not work. Some kids go off to college and they come back during the day. You got students going all different directions [making school-wide programming difficult].

Participant six reflected on the issues that technology has created for those investigating and issuing discipline for bullying. She indicated that technology caused myriad problems; it impedes investigations, facilitates increases reports of bullying, increases investigations, and increases confirmed acts of bullying all while increasing anonymity.

Technology, I think allows students to become anonymous, or not at least have to be the bully face to face, and so I think it increases the rate of bullying and because you don't have the person in front of you, you do not really know their body language, or their tone, and so I think a lot is perceived as bullying when,

before the phones, it was just maybe someone was mouthing off or picking on me, or something.

Technology also has the effect of allowing the bullying to occur outside the school walls, all while maintaining a nexus back to school, a prerequisite for school-based action (Shipley, 2011), making the job of an investigating administrator seemingly limitless in both scope and communication platform (i.e. text message, message board, social media). Such complexity requires the administrator to be extremely well versed the methods of modern communication to be able to fully understand and effectively investigate reports of bullying.

The structured interviews allowed for the participating administrators to share personal anecdotes of their experiences relative to investigating and issuing consequence for bullying at the high school level. A second methodology was employed in an attempt to build a comprehensive data set for the study. The researcher completed a comparative analysis of artifacts that demonstrate the official school and district positions on bullying. The district policies and procedures are the bedrock on which administrative decision-making is based. Policies provide not only the authority to act, but also specific directions, protocols, and procedures an administrator is compelled to follow. These documents provide critical perspectives on district practices relative to bullying. The findings are available in the next section.

Qualitative Measure: Artifact Analysis

The artifact analysis allowed the researcher to compare like documents from the school and district of the various participating administrators. The researcher compared available policies, procedures, student codes of conduct, and other school provided

documents that were pertinent to the topic of bullying.

School board policy comparative analysis.

When comparing policies, it became clear that many of the participating school districts were using a common template and common language for their policy on bullying. This is not surprising considering many districts in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania utilize the services of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA), a professional organization that provides policy services to over 500 school entities in the state. According to PSBA, “developing and maintaining effective policies that comprise both local specifications and ever-changing state and federal laws and regulations is a difficult, time-consuming task” (Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 2016). Districts can adopt the PSBA policy framework and then tailor the policy to their individual needs.

The comparative analysis of the school board policies for participating districts can be found in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11

Comparative elements within school board policy

Participant	Most recent adoption or review of policy	Legal definition of bullying	Locations where policy applies	Description of bullying behaviors	Compulsion of witnesses to act and/or report	Specific investigation steps to be taken	Inclusion in student handbook/code of conduct	Required availability in all classrooms, buildings, and website	Requirement for development of bullying prevention program	Possible consequences for violation of policy
1	2014	X	X				X	X		X
2	2015	X	X				X	X		X
3	2013	X	X				X	X		X
4	2012	X+	X	X+	X	X-	X	X-		X
5	2015	X	X	X+	X	X	X	X	X	X
6	2015	X	X				X	X		X

X+ = consequence calls for multiple applications of the discipline, i.e. multiple detentions

(X) = consequence is indicated as a possibility based on administrative discretion

As indicated in Table 4.11, there are five elements on which there is general consensus on inclusion into the policies of the district. They are, the legal definition of bullying as found in the Pennsylvania Code ("Public School Code of 1949," 2008), the location of where the policy applies, the requirement that bullying be addresses in the student handbook, the required availability of the policy (though the policy for participant four does not require availability in classrooms, just district buildings and website access. The remainder of policies requires classroom-level access), and the possible consequences for violation of the policy. One participant, participant four, had a policy that used an especially robust definition of bullying. The definition in this policy includes four additional indicators outside the state legal definition that constitutes bullying.

Two districts, four and five, have an added three additional components in their respective policies that other participants do not have. The policies include descriptions of bullying behaviors (participant four has the behaviors broken by category, participant five includes more than thirty behaviors that may constitute bullying), compulsion of witnesses to act or report, and specific investigative steps to be taken by the investigating administrator. Participant four has a policy that states the principal is authorized to complete an impartial, thorough investigation. The policy lists possible investigations steps that may be taken, but does not dictate the process. Participating district number five included yet a fourth additional step, which requires the development of a bullying prevention program.

According to the statute that governs the policy development, schools are required to include certain elements in the developed policies on bullying. The law requires the policy include the following:

- Be adopted by January 1, 2009;
- Delineate disciplinary consequences for bullying;
- May provide for prevention, intervention and education programs;
- Must be available on the website if available and in every classroom
- Be reviewed every three years
- Not be prohibited from defining bullying in such a way as to encompass acts that occur outside a school setting if those acts meet the requirements [of the definition]

The participating school districts all had policies as of the artifact collection in early 2016, though it is not possible to determine if they were in compliance as of January 2009. As indicated in Table 4.11, all participants included the possible consequences for bullying. Since the law says the policy may provide for prevention, intervention, and education programs, there is no legal requirement to do so. All policies account for the posting of the policy; though the policy from participant four is silent on posting in classrooms, which is a legal requirement of the law. All policies have been reviewed, save for participant four, within the past three years as indicated on the publically available policy. The policy from participant four was “last revised” in 2012, which does not indicate positively whether or not the policy was reviewed without revision in the past three years. All policies also indicate the location where the policy applies, meeting the final requirement of the law. As such, all policies appear to meet the minimum standard of the law, save for the posting requirement deficit of participant number four.

When looking at the investigative steps taken by participant five, the administrator is in compliance with the board policy regarding the specific steps an

administrator should take once a bullying complaint has been received. However, when asked if the policy contained any regulations relative to specific steps that must be taken when investigating reported acts of bullying, the participant responded, “it's not as detailed as that.” It is noteworthy that the participant's response is seemingly incongruent with the policy requirements. Though not necessarily significant on its own, such incongruences will be noted in chapter five, suggestions for schools.

Similarly, participating school district five is the only one required by policy to develop a bullying prevention program and yet participant five was one of two administrators that indicated there was no bullying prevention program available at the school (see Table 4.1). The significance of such findings will be discussed in the results and interpretations section of this chapter.

Student handbook/code of conduct comparative analysis.

The student handbook was another common artifact analyzed across participating school districts. The student handbooks offered an even greater diversity of information shared and communicated to students. Every handbook contained only two similar characteristics, the potential disciplinary steps for policy violation and a separate, standalone section of the handbook dedicated to bullying. Table 4.12 indicates the common components found in the various handbooks and while the characteristics are similar, they are also nuanced in their own way as indicated with the various demarcations found within Table 4.12.

Table 4.12

Comparative elements within student handbook or code of conduct

Participant	Legal definition of bullying	Citation of the state law	Descriptions of bullying behaviors	Action steps the victim should take	Reference to school board policy or policy number	Potential disciplinary steps for a violation of the policy	A separate section dedicated to bullying is present in the handbook
1			X			X-	X-
2	X		X-	X-		X-	X
3			X-	X	X	X-	X-
4	X+		X+		X+	X	X
5	X	X			X	X	X
6	X		X	X	X	X	X-

- = handbook includes a minimal description
+ = handbook includes a robust description

There are nuances to each of the indicators in Table 4.12 worth noting as these nuances are what create distinct differences between the participants. Relative to participant one, it should be noted that the handbook indicates that the infraction will result in disciplinary action “determined to be appropriate” by the administrator, resulting in a minus indicator in the table. Additionally, while having a separate section of the handbook dedicated to bullying and harassment, the bullying section is dedicated almost entirely to harassment with a brief definition of bullying at the bottom; the definition is not the state defined legal definition. Such minimal inclusions of bullying resulted in yet another minus indicator in the table.

Participant two also has unique elements worthy of discussion as indicated in Table 4.12. The code of conduct has a minimal description of bullying behaviors, the handbook links bullying and harassment labeling the section in the handbook as “harassment/bullying” but only lists harassing behaviors of which “bullying” is included. If a student is harassed or bullied, the code states that any student that student victims should report it to “designated employees” but does not indicate who these individuals are by name or title. Furthermore, the code does not contain specific disciplinary steps to be taken if a student is found to have violated the bullying policy. No discipline is prescribed, but it is indicated that discipline is progressive in nature and that infractions of the code of conduct “will be dealt with at the discretion of the administration.”

Participant three had a handbook that did very little to describe bullying and focused more on ethnic and sexual harassment. There was no definition of bullying contained in the handbook, nor were there descriptions of bullying behaviors. The handbook makes references to “bullying/harassment” and there are definitions of various

types of harassment in the handbook. While the handbook in some places lists bullying/harassment, in the student conduct section of the handbook; there are only references to harassment. Though in the standalone bullying section of the handbook, the reader is directed to view level II and level III infractions for bullying/harassment for which there are potential disciplinary measures outlined. Though the standalone section is labeled “bullying/harassment” it is dedicated almost entirely to harassment with referenced to bullying in name only.

Participant four has more robust elements in the student handbook as noted in Table 4.12. The definition of bullying in the handbook is the same as reflected in the policy for participant four. The definition of bullying is especially robust including additional indicators outside the state legal definition that constitute bullying. In providing descriptors of bullying behaviors and differing slightly from the policy, the handbook defines bullying behaviors under a number of categories. The names of the categories have been intentionally withheld to maintain anonymity of the participant. The handbook also provides reference to the board policy under which it derives its authority. The online version of the handbook not only points the reader to the policy, but also contains a hyperlink to allow the reader to access the board policy from within the student handbook. A plus indicator was added to these elements to distinguish the language as especially robust.

Participant six has a unique situation with how they define bullying. Not noteworthy of a plus or minus indicator in Table 4.12, the handbook has a definition that accompanies the disciplinary measures that is not the state legal definition of bullying. However, deeper within the handbook is another standalone section that provides the

legal definition. Also unique is the standalone section of bullying in the handbook for participant six. While most of the participants include supplementary information about the policy or prohibited behaviors in the standalone section regarding bullying, participant six contains only the state legal definition of bullying with no additional information or reference materials. As such, a minus indicator was added to note the limited nature of the entry in the student handbook.

The two documents discussed herein were the most illustrative and equally comparable between participating school districts. The component areas discussed for both the policy comparison and the handbook comparison indicate that there is little unity among the participating school districts. While some schools presented robust and clear documents such as the easily navigable and electronically up-to-date documents presented by participant four, others, such as participants one and three, did little to distinguish between bullying and harassment while using the terms nearly interchangeably without providing the legal definition of bullying or a citation of the state law.

Results

Analysis of data

This chapter presented a summary of the findings from the qualitative measurement of administrative experiences in investigating and assigning discipline for reported acts of bullying in high schools. This section will present analysis of the findings as they relate to the supplemental research questions as they, in concert with one another, help to answer the central question of the study.

Sub-question one.

The first supplemental research question explored the system utilized by high school administrators when investigating reported incidents of bullying. The results in this area were communicated in both the practice of the administrator and the supporting documents at the school and district level. As demonstrated in Tables 4.2 and 4.3 administrators offered widely variable definitions they use when investigating reported acts of bullying. Without a unified understanding of what bullying is and is not, it is plausible that administrative reaction to reported acts of bullying going to be widely disparate between participating school districts. This becomes critically important for the next research question as many schools employ a great deal of administrative discretion when determining the appropriate consequence for bullying. The critical finding here is that administrators, knowingly or unknowingly are applying discretion to what does and does not constitute bullying, something that is universally and unambiguously defined in both the law and in every policy of every participating district as indicated in Table 4.11. While critical to the research question, this finding cannot be considered surprising, especially in light of the fact that the supporting student handbooks for the participating schools lack consistency and only four of the six participants provide the legal definition of bullying to their students via handbook as seen in Table 4.12.

Sub-question two.

The second supplemental question investigated the system utilized by high school administrators when disciplining confirmed incidents of bullying. The results in this area were even more disparate than the first supplemental research question. As evidenced by the information contained in Tables 4.6 and 4.7, the manner in which the participating

administrators consequence for confirmed acts and repeated confirmed acts of bullying was starkly variable. While one participant may issue a warning, another participant is suspending the student from school and contacting police. Where a repeat violator in one setting may get two or three after school detentions, another student is being suspended for as many as ten days of school. The impact on the student, the family, the educational record, and the educational process of the two students in the scenarios above are vastly, if not immeasurably, different. To explain such a phenomenon, one need not look far. Though every participating district had, as a matter of policy, a list of possible consequences a student can face if found in violation of the policy (see Table 4.11), half of the participants had no prescribed discipline in the code of student conduct or student handbook for first time violations of the bullying policy. Therefore, responsibility for determining discipline was solely up to administrative discretion. While an argument could be made that giving the experienced and trained administrators the discretion to make such a decision is wise and prudent, one must not forget that not a single participating administrator recalled having any bullying training in their principal preparation program. Some of the participants had no supplemental training on bullying since their principal preparation programs; therefore, leaving the decision up to administrative discretion may not be putting the decision in the hands of a trained practitioner after all.

Discretion had one other notable downside: variability within the same building. Half of the participants worked in schools with multiple disciplinarians; if policy, procedure, and practice permit for wide ranges of administrative discretion, then the possibility of outcome variability, even within the same site, was extraordinarily high.

While one can consider that no two situations are ever alike, one must also accept that a scenario with the same basic fact structure addressed by two separate administrators exercising administrative discretion could yield wildly incongruent outcomes.

One must also consider that many of the policies and student handbooks equated harassment and bullying. While there are characteristics that cross over the two titles, the two are not equal and do not share a definition under the Pennsylvania law. As such, they should not be treated the same as a matter of policy and procedure. Doing so not only confuses students looking for protection under a bullying policy, but also administrators tasked with applying the same policies. As indicated in the discussion subsequent to Table 4.7, where participants four and five indicated that bullying might not always be the terminology applied to an incident, even if the act meets the definition of same. This occurred because a behavior or act may supersede the bullying (such as physical injury) and thus resulted in the term “bullying” not being applied or the policy violation not ever being logged in any official capacity.

Sub-question three.

Supplemental question three considered the challenges high school administrators faced when investigating and administering consequence for incidents of bullying. Participating administrators were surprisingly unified in this area because the frustrations centered on similar themes. In Table 4.9 participants described the major investigative challenges as seeking out the truth because of student propensities to lie to not only protect them but also to protect their friends and not be viewed as a “snitch.” Participants also discussed how parents can be challenging, in some cases sending a lawyer to the school to protect their child’s interests, as early as the investigation stage of an incident.

The final common theme was the challenge presented by electronic devices and social media, not only because the evidence of an infraction can be deleted or covered up as quickly as it is disseminated, but also the ease and anonymity to bully and torment one's peers behind the security of a computer or mobile screen. Relative to disciplining, administrators shared common challenges in Table 4.10 such as making sure the student take accountability for the policy violation, overcoming parental objections to both the process and the outcome, and applying the administrative discretion discussed here in a manner that is ultimately fair, educational, and deterrent in nature. The last notable common challenge was the time to complete the process from investigation through discipline, including possible legal proceedings, back through restorative practice and student well being. Participants three and six both reflected on the scarce resource of time when reflecting on challenges to successful implementation of policy and procedure.

Central question.

The central question in the study was, what is the administrative experience in responding to reported bullying incidents at the high school level? The supplemental questions point to a clear finding: the experience of participating administrators is widely varied from school to school, and district to district. This finding was supported by the evidence presented in each of the sub-questions and by the comparative artifact analysis. Participants investigate and discipline reported and confirmed acts of bullying in vastly different ways and yet they all shared similar and unified frustrations relative to the process and outcomes. It was clear that, while each of the participating schools operates under the same guidelines from the same law, the resulting output from each participant was as inconsistent as were the policies and procedures under which each participating

administrator operated.

Interpretations

The results of the study indicate that more research is needed in the area of bullying best practices. Participating administrators appeared to be operating in ethical and reasonable ways considering their level of training, experience, and their access to resources. The participants believed their processes and procedures resulted in reduced rates of recidivism, and that their practices were in the best interest of the students while being policy driven. This research points to emerging essential questions relative to bullying practices and procedures. These include the following:

- Do schools/districts feel their bullying processes are effective?
- Do other constituent groups (i.e. parents, school board members, community members, local law enforcement) feel district bullying processes are effective?
- Do schools/districts wish to have more unified processes, policies, and procedures across the county? Across the intermediate units? Across the state?
- Should an anti-bullying program be mandatory at all schools in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania?
- Should schools consider implementing more social education components at the high school level?
- Should there be ongoing training required for high school administrators on the topic of bullying?

The answers to these questions point to possible recommendations necessary to address the findings of the study presented here. Schools and school districts should, as a result of this study, consider the value of implementing changes to address the questions above.

Such recommendations could include: creating a countywide (or statewide) task force to unify policies and procedures; a revision of the state law to unify policies, practices, and procedures; implementation of anti-bullying programs as a requirement in all schools; statewide requirements for social education at the high school level; required training for administrators on the topic of bullying on an ongoing basis. The implementation of such recommendations would be immediately impactful on the data and results of this study.

Summary

The results and findings presented in chapter four indicate alignment with the research questions and provide evidence of high school administrators' experience in responding to reported acts of bullying. The use of multiple qualitative measures presented a comprehensive perspective of administrative practice in investigating and issuing discipline for bullying incidents. The comparative artifact analysis provided context for administrative action and also indicated district compliance with the state law that governs bullying policies in Pennsylvania. Chapter five contains further interpretation of the findings and results, conclusions relative to the research questions, and recommendations for action based on the findings, results, and conclusions.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a summary of the qualitative methodologies employed to understand the administrative experience associated with responding to reported acts of bullying at the high school level. This chapter is divided into three sections; the first will provide a review of the study, the methodologies used, and results in consideration of the literature. The second will focus on conclusions where the research will provide answers to the research questions that guided the study. The third section will offer recommendations based on the findings of the study. In understanding the problem of bullying, the researcher demonstrates the need for additional research to be conducted in the area of bullying, especially at the high school level, where limited research exists. The recommendations will include suggestions for schools, suggestions for stakeholder, and suggestions for future research.

Review of the Study

In a 2003 article about the potential legal implications for administrators regarding bullying, author Perry Zirkel discussed “the broad but fuzzy boundaries of ‘bullying’” (Zirkel, 2003); a short but telling description about the nebulous nature of bullying definitions. The literature review in chapter two indicated that the vagueness problem still persisted as noted by McNeil (2011) and continued until 2014 when Gladden et al. (2014), through the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the United States Department of Education furnished the research community with a unified definition of bullying. Without a unified definition, researchers have struggled to uncover accurate metrics as to

the actual prevalence of bullying, putting estimates between 13% and 75% of youths as having been bullied (Swearer et al. (2010) as cited in Gladden et al. (2014)). Research indicated that bullying is both serious and widely prevalent in schools. Victims of bullying were found to have academic and social ramifications as a result of their victimization. Juvonen et al. (2010) noted decreased grades in victims of bullying as well as decreased levels of academic engagement. Studies consistently showed that bullying behaviors could be correlated to decreased student achievement (Lacey & Cornell, 2013), increased rates of depression, suicidal thoughts, loneliness, absenteeism, and higher overall depressive symptoms (Aalsma & Brown, 2008; Bogart et al., 2014). Consistent data from studies across the globe, including work by Strøm et al. (2013) in Norway, indicated bullying is not just a problem in the United States, but around the globe and yet, only an estimated 4% of bullying incidents are observed by adults (Goodwin, 2011).

Research also indicated that parents find the bullying investigation process confusing, rarely understanding to whom a report should be made; many parents also reported a belief that bullying is left largely unaddressed by school officials (J. R. Brown et al., 2013). Research also indicated the overall importance of including parents in the administrative process relative to bullying (J. R. Brown et al., 2013; Sawyer et al., 2011; Waasdorp et al., 2011). Further research indicated that school employees, including teachers and administrators, also have varied perceptions about the prevalence and pervasive nature of bullying (Dake et al., 2004; Kennedy et al., 2012; Mishna et al., 2005). Many teachers expressed that they are unaware their students are bullied, and administrators were noted, to a vast degree, as believing their school rate of bullying was below the national averages.

Lastly, the role of the principal in creating a positive school climate and culture cannot be understated. Research showed the principal was critical in influencing and creating a safe, orderly learning environment for students (Gietz & McIntosh, 2014; Gülşen & Gülenay, 2014; MacNeil et al., 2009). Further research indicated that, second only to teachers, administrators have a profound effect on student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2008; Leithwood et al., 2004).

This study sought to analyze certain bullying elements found in the literature in the researcher's local area. Research of bullying is robust at the elementary and middle school levels. However, research is limited at the high school level, therefore, this research was conducted to contribute to the body of literature studying high school bullying. By understanding the experience of high school administrators in addressing acts of bullying, the primary audience for this study can determine the need for adjusting current policies, processes, and protocols based on the outcomes presented herein.

The findings of the study are based on a structured interview protocol with six administrators that are responsible for investigating and issuing consequence for bullying in their respective schools. Additionally, a comparative artifact analysis was conducted to uncover distinguishing attributes unique to the participating districts and schools. The conclusions answered the central research question: what is the administrative experience in responding to reported bullying incidents at the high school level? This was supported by three sub-questions as follows:

1. What actions do high school administrators take when investigating reported incidents of bullying?
2. What methods of discipline do high school administrators utilize when

addressing confirmed incidents of bullying?

3. What challenges do high school administrators face when investigating and administering consequence for incidents of bullying?

The answers to the research questions and researcher conclusions were informed by the review of the literature as noted in chapter two and by the qualitative data collected and analyzed as indicated in chapter four.

Methodology and Data Analysis

This study was conducted using two qualitative methodologies. The primary measure included a five-part structured interview with similarly situated administrators in the designated research area. The open-ended response format allowed participants to comment on all facets of their approach to bullying. Participants were interviewed regarding investigative protocols, disciplinary protocols, and barriers to successful investigation and discipline. The results of which served to answer the three supplemental research questions. As a secondary methodology, the researcher conducted a comparative document analysis of similar documents within each participating school district. The data collected as part of the second methodology served to corroborate and challenge data collected from the structured interview. The results of the second methodology provided context and detail to the supplemental research questions which providing information critical to answering the central research question. The information, in concert, provided a robust answer for the central research question.

Outcomes of the Study in Relation to the Literature Review

The results of the study were intended to understand the administrative experience in addressing bullying incidents at the high school level. Perhaps the most prevalent

notion in the literature is that no school is immune to bullying; that bullying is present, prevalent, and the result of victimization is severe (Alvarez, 2013; S. Brown & Taylor, 2008; Gladden et al., 2014; Jones & Augustine, 2015; Lacey et al., 2015; Olweus, 1988, 1993; Petrosino et al., 2010; Thomas, 2012). This study revealed the same to be true; all participants reported bullying was present in their schools. All participants also were noted as making good faith efforts to fully investigate reports of bullying and discipline for confirmed bullying policy violations.

The literature indicated that bullying definitions are varied and widely disparate (Gladden et al., 2014; McNeil, 2011; Smith, Cowie, Olafsson, & Liefhoghe, 2002; Vaillancourt et al., 2008). The results of this study indicated results consistent with existing research. Participants' definitions of bullying were widely disparate from one another as well as different from both the state law definition of bullying and the definition accepted by the United States Department of Education.

The research was not rich in best practices for administrators involved with the investigation of bullying. One study indicated that "school officials must go beyond the initial report and make a complete investigation that includes reporting back to parents what will be done to provide safety" (J. R. Brown et al., 2013, p. 513). In looking at the investigation protocols of participating administrators, only three administrators (50%) indicated that their standard investigative practice included parental communication or notification. Interestingly, the same numbers of participants (50%) involve the police through local law enforcement or school resource officers as schools that routinely involve parents.

Parental involvement proved to be an emergent theme in both the literature and in

this study. While literature indicates parents find the reporting process for bullying confusing (J. R. Brown et al., 2013), participating administrators in this study found parental involvement to be a noted impediment to the disciplinary process. Certainly the experience of parents of those victimized versus those of alleged perpetrators is going to be different, parental involvement cannot be viewed as a universal positive or negative based on the outcome of this study.

Research also indicated that parents were reticent to make reports regarding their victimized child as noted by J. R. Brown et al. (2013) “our data suggest that all but one parent [n=11] believed their child’s victimization would continue even though they followed through in reporting bullying to their youth’s school officials” (p. 513). The findings of this study do not support the parental notion of increased victimization subsequent to reporting. Participants enthusiastically stated their anecdotal successes with interventions and specifically noted the extremely low rates of recidivism after addressing a report of bullying.

Another emerging theme from the study had to do with the implementation of research-based programming to address bullying in the participant schools. Research suggested that school wide positive behavior programs have shown successful outcomes by educating parents, students, and school personnel about bullying behaviors and intervention strategies (Allen, 2010; J. R. Brown et al., 2013; Good et al., 2011; Swearer et al., 2010). Interestingly, none of the participating schools utilized a fully implemented, research-based positive behavior program or anti-bullying program with their respective school. As a result, there was neither a structured support system in place for students nor a structured student educational process to help stem the systemic issue of bullying in

any of the schools studied.

Conclusions

Participating administrators provided robust and multi-faceted perspectives on the experience of high school administrators in responding to bullying incidents. The participants presented their experience with investigation protocols that were widely disparate. The two-stage qualitative data collection indicated that administrators were not trained in their principal preparation programs with any information regarding bullying and only one participant (17%) receives ongoing training on the topic of bullying. One other participant, bringing the total to two participants (33%) received training on bullying in the twelve months prior to the structured interview conducted for this study. Some investigative steps were generally similar in content with all participants looking to conduct thorough and impartial investigations, though they varied noticeably in the number of investigative steps and the people involved in the process. The artifact analysis revealed that while the policies for the participating districts shared common elements, the resultant investigation and discipline were still widely variable.

Bridged between investigation and discipline is the involvement of local law enforcement. The two schools with school resource officers (SRO) were noted as involving the SRO sooner in the investigation process than schools that needed to notify a separate law enforcement entity. The two schools (33%) with school resource officers saw increased involvement in bullying issues, not necessarily from arrests or other legal sanctions, than those needing to contact outside local law enforcement. Ironically, schools that utilize police as a matter of standard bullying investigation and disciplinary practice [n=3, 50%], equals the number of schools that involve parents in the process

[n=3, 50%]. Two of the participants are the same, notifying police and parents as part of the standard disciplinary practice.

Relative to discipline, one critical finding seemed to stand above the others; three of the participants (50%) exercised little to no discretion when disciplining for first-time and recurring bullying policy violators. The other three participants (50%) exercised total and complete discretion when issuing discipline for bullying policy violations. As a result of this discretionary disciplinary application, discipline ranged from the absolute minimum, an administrative warning, to the absolute maximum a principal or assistant principal can issue without school board intervention, a ten day out of school suspension. Such a wide spread of disciplinary applications, quite literally the minimum to the maximum, sends differing messages of seriousness of bullying investigations and disciplinary practices to students and parents. While the violation is identical from school to school, a confirmed bullying policy infraction, the outcome was as widely disparate as organizationally possible. The disparate nature of the disciplinary practices was noted in the structured interview protocol and supported by the comparative artifact analysis. Also disparate were the aftercare steps taken by participating administrators. Post-disciplinary implementation of restorative practices was noted in only two of six participants (33%). Thus, leaving open the possibility that in the majority of participating schools (67%) that the victim and offender would never settle the bullying issue face-to-face, though the involved students would maintain their status as peers within the same school building.

When asked to describe the challenges to investigation or discipline, common themes emerged from participating administrators. Relative to investigation,

administrators noted the difficulty in eliciting honest responses from all students involved in the investigation including witnesses, victims, alleged perpetrators, and parents.

Students were hesitant to give information up and be viewed as a “narc” or “snitch” while parents were hesitant to give information for fear of continued victimization. Parents were also noted as impeding the investigative process when their son or daughter was viewed as accused of a policy violation, resisting the investigative process, preventing the administrator from speaking with the child, showing up on school grounds, or, in one case, sending an attorney on the student’s behalf. Participants also noted the difficulty that technology is creating for administrators. Technology, via anonymous applications, social media sites, and other always-emerging avenues, results in increased bullying reports as noted by the participants. Students were noted as being able to bully their peers without having to face them, something that has increased overall reports and confirmed incidents of bullying.

Recommendations

The recommendations indicated here are based on the available literature and the findings and results of this study. The recommendations are divided into three sections. The first section contains recommendations for the participating schools and those similarly situated schools as in the study. The second section contains recommendations to other stakeholders with an interest in addressing bullying in schools. These stakeholders include parents, educators, school board members, and policy makers. The final section makes recommendations for future research to continue the development of best practices for bullying prevention and intervention as well as supporting a continuing, modern literature base on bullying.

Recommendations for Schools

The data collected in this study point to widely disparate practices and protocols within similarly situated schools in a narrow geographic area. As such, the researcher recommends the following:

- Formation of a regional bullying task force to compare investigative and disciplinary practices and recommend best practice protocols for a regionally unified response to bullying;
- Further local-level investigation into the barriers of successful investigation and disciplinary practices with recommendations for action steps to minimize such barriers;
- Investigation into implementation of research-based anti-bullying curricula or programming at the high school level;
- Implementation of student and parent information sessions on bullying, bullying behaviors, possible discipline for policy violations, information on reporting procedures, and resources for those victimized;
- Implement meaningful administrative induction and ongoing training programs that educate on compliance with established laws, policies, and procedures.

These recommendations are supported by both the literature and the findings of this study. Many of the recommendations suggest a simple review of practices and procedures to ensure appropriate action and response to acts of bullying along with opportunities for information sharing and knowledge building. Additionally, the recommendation for ongoing administrator training is critical to supporting those tasked with responding to reports of bullying.

Recommendations for Stakeholders

As indicated in the literature and as indicated by the data of this study, there are areas relative to bullying policies, practices, and protocols in which interested stakeholders can affect change. These recommendations are meant for broader implementation and would have the effect of changing policies, procedures, and actions at a legislative and regulative level. Thus, the researcher recommends the following:

- Review of current legislation and implementation of changes to narrow widely disparate responses to bullying;
- Creation of a statewide system of reporting bullying incidents so that data are not lost when behaviors are coded as a different violation (i.e. assault);
- Implementation of requirements for principal certification to include training on bullying and responses to bullying both pre-service and while in service as a principal;
- Creation of parent informational modules to provide parents with information regarding bullying, legal requirements, legal definitions, and resources to both prevent and intervene with bullying.

The recommendations for stakeholders are meant for policy makers and legislators to consider broad-based responses to bullying. In providing more structure and guidance to schools and practitioners through law and regulation, one would expect the disparate responses to bullying as seen in the data of this study to diminish in frequency and amplitude.

Recommendations for Future Research

While this study contributes to the body of literature critical to understanding

bullying, there still remains a dearth of literature relative to bullying at the high school level. The recommendations for additional research presented here are based on the existing body of literature and on the results of this study. Research clearly indicates that bullying is widely prevalent, and the effects are extremely pervasive; therefore, the researcher recommends the following:

- Continued study on the rates of bullying prevalence;
- Study the impact of bullying on victims, noting positive or negative experiences with administrative interventions;
- Study the best practices for aftercare for victims of bullying to mitigate the effects of bullying as noted in prior research;
- Study to determine the best intervention practices, both investigative and disciplinary, for bullying incidents to support the victim and deter future bullying behaviors on behalf of the perpetrator;
- Expanded study of administrative experiences to develop broadly applicable conclusions about the current state of bullying in the state or country;
- Study the impact and effectiveness of anti-bullying programs and curricula on students, teachers, and administrators;
- Continued study on the link between rates of bullying and student achievement data;
- Study of the manner in which bullying practices, protocols, and procedures vary depending on student population size;
- Study the specific practices and procedures associated with investigating and disciplining acts of bullying where the student and/or victim are noted as being an

individual with special needs.

Further research in these areas will continue to meaningfully contribute to the body of research on bullying. Bullying is an issue in which no school is excluded; therefore, ongoing study on the effects of bullying, the prevalence of bullying, and the best practices for prevention, intervention, and support of bullying victims can provide information critical to improving practices globally.

Summary

Bullying is a persistent and pervasive threat to all schools. Research indicated that no school is immune to the threat of bullying and there is no antidote to curtail bullying in schools. This study showed that even with a law that provides consistent guidance to schools and policies that were generally similar, the outcomes to responses to bullying could still vary widely even within a narrow geographic area with similarly situated schools. Results of this study indicated that administrators struggle to consistently define the act of bullying. In addition, it was discovered that participating administrators respond to bullying reports in widely disparate ways. Lastly, the results of this study indicated that participating administrators issued consequences for confirmed acts of bullying in a dramatically disparate and inconsistent fashion between participating schools. To have any hope of stemming the bullying epidemic plaguing schools across the globe, administrators must take stock of inefficient and disparate practices and strive to create protocols and procedures that best support victimized students when they are most in need.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Pa. Cons. Stat. §13-1303.1-A

Section 1303.1-A. Policy Relating to Bullying.--(a) No later than January 1, 2009, each school entity shall adopt a policy or amend its existing policy relating to bullying and incorporate the policy into the school entity's code of student conduct required under 22 Pa. Code § 12.3(c) (relating to school rules). The policy shall delineate disciplinary consequences for bullying and may provide for prevention, intervention and education programs, provided that no school entity shall be required to establish a new policy under this section if one currently exists and reasonably fulfills the requirements of this section. The policy shall identify the appropriate school staff person to receive reports of incidents of alleged bullying.

(b) Each school entity shall make the policy available on its publicly accessible Internet website, if available, and in every classroom. Each school entity shall post the policy at a prominent location within each school building where such notices are usually posted. Each school entity shall ensure that the policy and procedures for reporting bullying incidents are reviewed with students within ninety (90) days after their adoption and thereafter at least once each school year.

(c) Each school entity shall review its policy every three (3) years and annually provide the office with a copy of its policy relating to bullying, including information related to the development and implementation of any bullying prevention, intervention and education programs. The information required under this subsection shall be attached to or made part of the annual report required under section 1303-A(b).

(d) In its policy relating to bullying adopted or maintained under subsection (a), a school entity shall not be prohibited from defining bullying in such a way as to encompass acts that occur outside a school setting if those acts meet the requirements contained in subsection (e)(1), (3) and (4). If a school entity reports acts of bullying to the office in

accordance with section 1303-A(b), it shall report all incidents that qualify as bullying under the entity's adopted definition of that term.

(e) For purposes of this article, "bullying" shall mean an intentional electronic, written, verbal or physical act, or a series of acts:

- (1) directed at another student or students;
- (2) which occurs in a school setting;
- (3) that is severe, persistent or pervasive; and
- (4) that has the effect of doing any of the following:
 - (i) substantially interfering with a student's education;
 - (ii) creating a threatening environment; or
 - (iii) substantially disrupting the orderly operation of the school; and

"school setting" shall mean in the school, on school grounds, in school vehicles, at a designated bus stop or at any activity sponsored, supervised or sanctioned by the school.

(1303.1-A added July 9, 2008, P.L.846, No.61)

Appendix B: CT Gen Stat § 10-222d (2012)

(a) As used in this section, sections 10-222g to 10-222i, inclusive, and section 10-222k:

(1) “Bullying” means (A) the repeated use by one or more students of a written, oral or electronic communication, such as cyberbullying (sic), directed at or referring to another student attending school in the same school district, or (B) a physical act or gesture by one or more students repeatedly directed at another student attending school in the same school district, that: (i) Causes physical or emotional harm to such student or damage to such student’s property, (ii) places such student in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself, or of damage to his or her property, (iii) creates a hostile environment at school for such student, (iv) infringes on the rights of such student at school, or (v) substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school. “Bullying” shall include, but not be limited to, a written, oral or electronic communication or physical act or gesture based on any actual or perceived differentiating characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, socioeconomic status, academic status, physical appearance, or mental, physical, developmental or sensory disability, or by association with an individual or group who has or is perceived to have one or more of such characteristics;

(2) “Cyberbullying” means any act of bullying through the use of the Internet, interactive and digital technologies, cellular mobile telephone or other mobile electronic devices or any electronic communications;

(3) “Mobile electronic device” means any hand-held or other portable electronic equipment capable of providing data communication between two or more individuals, including, but not limited to, a text messaging device, a paging device, a personal digital assistant, a laptop computer, equipment that is capable of playing a video game or a digital video disk, or equipment on which digital images are taken or transmitted;

(4) “Electronic communication” means any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data or intelligence of any nature transmitted in whole or in part by a wire, radio, electromagnetic, photoelectronic (sic) or photo-optical system;

(5) “Hostile environment” means a situation in which bullying among students is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of the school climate;

(6) “Outside of the school setting” means at a location, activity or program that is not school related, or through the use of an electronic device or a mobile electronic device that is not owned, leased or used by a local or regional board of education;

(7) “School employee” means (A) a teacher, substitute teacher, school administrator, school superintendent, guidance counselor, psychologist, social worker, nurse, physician, school paraprofessional or coach employed by a local or regional board of education or working in a public elementary, middle or high school; or (B) any other individual who, in the performance of his or her duties, has regular contact with students and who provides services to or on behalf of students enrolled in a public elementary, middle or high school, pursuant to a contract with the local or regional board of education; and

(8) “School climate” means the quality and character of school life with a particular focus on the quality of the relationships within the school community between and among students and adults.

(b) Each local and regional board of education shall develop and implement a safe school climate plan to address the existence of bullying in its schools. Such plan shall: (1) Enable students to anonymously report acts of bullying to school employees and require students and the parents or guardians of students to be notified annually of the process by which students may make such reports, (2) enable the parents or guardians of students to file written reports of suspected bullying, (3) require school employees who witness acts of bullying or receive reports of bullying to orally notify the safe school climate specialist, described in section 10-222k, or another school administrator if the safe school climate specialist is unavailable, not later than one school day after such school employee witnesses or receives a report of bullying, and to file a written report not later than two school days after making such oral report, (4) require the safe school climate specialist to

investigate or supervise the investigation of all reports of bullying and ensure that such investigation is completed promptly after receipt of any written reports made under this section, (5) require the safe school climate specialist to review any anonymous reports, except that no disciplinary action shall be taken solely on the basis of an anonymous report, (6) include a prevention and intervention strategy, as defined by section 10-222g, for school employees to deal with bullying, (7) provide for the inclusion of language in student codes of conduct concerning bullying, (8) require each school to notify the parents or guardians of students who commit any verified acts of bullying and the parents or guardians of students against whom such acts were directed not later than forty-eight hours after the completion of the investigation described in subdivision (4) of this subsection, (9) require each school to invite the parents or guardians of a student who commits any verified act of bullying and the parents or guardians of the student against whom such act was directed to a meeting to communicate to such parents or guardians the measures being taken by the school to ensure the safety of the student against whom such act was directed and to prevent further acts of bullying, (10) establish a procedure for each school to document and maintain records relating to reports and investigations of bullying in such school and to maintain a list of the number of verified acts of bullying in such school and make such list available for public inspection, and annually report such number to the Department of Education, and in such manner as prescribed by the Commissioner of Education, (11) direct the development of case-by-case interventions for addressing repeated incidents of bullying against a single individual or recurrently perpetrated bullying incidents by the same individual that may include both counseling and discipline, (12) prohibit discrimination and retaliation against an individual who reports or assists in the investigation of an act of bullying, (13) direct the development of student safety support plans for students against whom an act of bullying was directed that address safety measures the school will take to protect such students against further acts of bullying, (14) require the principal of a school, or the principal's designee, to notify the appropriate local law enforcement agency when such principal, or the principal's designee, believes that any acts of bullying constitute criminal conduct, (15) prohibit bullying (A) on school grounds, at a school-sponsored or school-related activity, function or program whether on or off school grounds, at a school bus stop, on a school

bus or other vehicle owned, leased or used by a local or regional board of education, or through the use of an electronic device or an electronic mobile device owned, leased or used by the local or regional board of education, and (B) outside of the school setting if such bullying (i) creates a hostile environment at school for the student against whom such bullying was directed, (ii) infringes on the rights of the student against whom such bullying was directed at school, or (iii) substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school, (16) require, at the beginning of each school year, each school to provide all school employees with a written or electronic copy of the school district's safe school climate plan, and (17) require that all school employees annually complete the training described in section 10-220a or section 10-222j. The notification required pursuant to subdivision (8) of this subsection and the invitation required pursuant to subdivision (9) of this subsection shall include a description of the response of school employees to such acts and any consequences that may result from the commission of further acts of bullying.

(c) Not later than January 1, 2012, each local and regional board of education shall approve the safe school climate plan developed pursuant to this section and submit such plan to the Department of Education. Not later than thirty calendar days after approval of such plan by the local or regional board of education, the board shall make such plan available on the board's and each individual school in the school district's Internet web site and ensure that such plan is included in the school district's publication of the rules, procedures and standards of conduct for schools and in all student handbooks.

(d) On and after July 1, 2012, and biennially thereafter, each local and regional board of education shall require each school in the district to complete an assessment using the school climate assessment instruments, including surveys, approved and disseminated by the Department of Education pursuant to section 10-222h. Each local and regional board of education shall collect the school climate assessments for each school in the district and submit such school climate assessments to the department.

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Central Question: What is the administrative experience in responding to reported bullying incidents at the high school level?

Section 1: Demographic questions

1. Age
2. Sex
3. Highest level of education
4. Number of years as a high school administrator
5. Certificate type/kind/level
6. Number of students enrolled in school
7. School 2014-2015 School Performance Profile (SPP) Score

Section 2: General bullying questions:

8. Does your district have a policy on bullying? Could you give me a summary of what the policy says?
9. Does your district have any administrative regulations and/or written procedures on bullying? If so, could you please summarize the contents/requirements?
10. Does your school have any organized school-wide positive behavior or anti-bullying programs? If so, please elaborate on the nature of the program and how it is implemented in your school.
11. What does your handbook or student discipline code contain regarding bullying?
12. What kind of ongoing training does your organization provide to administrators on the topic of bullying?
 - a. When was the last training, either internal or external, that you had specific to bullying? Will you please describe the training?
 - b. What kind of training did you receive in your principal preparation program or graduate study specific to bullying?

Research sub-question interview protocol:

Section 3: Sub-question one: what is the system utilized by high school administrators when investigating reported incidents of bullying?

13. How do you define the act of bullying?
14. Does your district have a protocol that must be followed when investigating acts of reported bullying?
 - a. If so, what are those steps?
 - b. Do you use any other investigative steps outside the district protocol?
15. What steps do you follow when a student reports that he or she has been the victim of bullying?

16. What steps do you follow if a third party, such as a parent, reports an act of bullying that occurred at school?
17. What information do you collect relative to the offending behavior?
18. What information do you collect regarding the reported victim?
19. What are the distinguishing factors that help you determine if an act is one of bullying vs. other inappropriate behavior?
20. How do you believe your investigation protocol is successful in helping address the issue of bullying in your school? OR Do you believe your investigation protocol is successful in addressing bullying in your school, why or why not?

Section 4: Sub-question two: what is the system utilized by high school administrators when disciplining confirmed incidents of bullying?

21. What is the prescribed discipline for a first time bully in your discipline code?
 - a. Are there prescribed consequences for repeat offenders? If so, what are the consequences for such behavior?
22. Are there provisions for deviating from the prescribed code (in either direction: more/less discipline)? If so, could you please elaborate?
23. How are any of the following individuals involved in the process as part of your normal procedure?
 - a. Parents
 - b. School Counselors and/or School Psychologist
 - c. Local Law Enforcement
 - d. Higher administration (principal, assistant superintendent, superintendent)
24. How do you believe your disciplinary protocol is successful in helping address the issue of bullying in your school?

Section 5: Sub-question three: what challenges do high school administrators face when investigating and administering consequence for incidents of bullying?

25. What challenges do you face when investigating reported acts of bullying?
26. What challenges do you face when administering discipline for confirmed acts of bullying?
27. Is there any information regarding the manner in which you investigate or consequence bullying or any information regarding challenges you face regarding same that you wish to share or you think is important that the researcher understand?

Appendix D: Document Collection Protocol

Document collection matrix

Directions: For each school participating in the study, include a description of the artifacts collected. If the artifact does not fit into the named category, include it under one of the available “other pertinent, school provided documents” section of the matrix.

School number (assigned randomly for record keeping): _____

Document or artifact	Description
District policy	
District administrative regulation/written procedures	
Student code of conduct/handbook	
School-wide positive behavior or anti-bullying program documents	
Other pertinent, school provided documents	
Other pertinent, school provided documents	
Other pertinent, school provided documents	
Other pertinent, school provided documents	
Other pertinent, school provided documents	

Appendix E: Correspondence - Request for Access to District Administrators

Dear Superintendent:

My name is Mark Covelle and I am presently an administrator at REDACTED High School in the REDACTED School District. As a doctoral student at Drexel University, I have been engaged in planning research related to bullying at the high school setting. The purpose of this study is to understand the systems that high school administrators employ when investigating and disciplining acts of bullying. While the bullying law under which administrators act is the same (24 P.S. § 13-1303.1-A), local school authorities are tasked with creating policies and procedures that meet the requirements of the statute. My research is designed to compare the local policies and procedures to gain an understanding as to the manner in which high schools in the region address the issue of bullying. By collecting this information from administrators, it is the hope of the researcher to understand what is effective in addressing bullying and what barriers exist to successful implementation of existing protocols and procedures.

My supervising professor, Dr. Ken Mawritz, and I are interested in interviewing 6 to 8 high school administrators in the Lehigh Valley and surrounding areas including Lehigh, Northampton, Carbon, and Bucks counties.

With your permission, I would like to contact high school administrators in your district. After receiving your approval, I will contact each high school administrator with an invitation letter where I will ask for his or her willingness to participate. The first 6 to 8 to volunteers will be included in the study. The interviews will be part of a regional case study regarding responses to bullying.

Participants will be assigned a number by the researcher that will be used in the interview to cancel their identity throughout the interview process. The session will be audio recorded through Apple software with the interviewee's permission and then transcribed utilizing a transcription service. The researcher will also ask for written policies and procedures that exist at the school relative to bullying. These can be collected at the time of the interview or at a different time should the materials not be available or on hand. Each of these materials will be associated with the participant number so that no identity to the school or school district would be realized.

Each participant will be asked to sign a statement of informed consent detailing the purpose of the study and the participant's right to rescind participation at any time, for any reason, without repercussion.

The study will involve one interview that will last for approximately 60 minutes. I am happy to coordinate my interview schedule within any parameters you or the administrator establishes. If you do not want any research being conducted during the school day, I am able to accommodate. Any current clearances that you need will be produced upon your request. In addition, I will be happy to share any data you or the Board of School Directors wish to see. It is my hope that the findings may be relevant and meaningful your district and high school(s).

I am greatly appreciative of your willingness to help me better understand this phenomenon. Please let me know if you are willing to allow your administrators to participate in this study by replying to this email. Additionally, if your district has any specific protocols for requesting access to and participation of district employees, please let me know such details. If I can answer any questions for you before you make a decision, please contact me at REDACTED or via email at mnc44@drexel.edu.

Sincerely,

Mark N. Covelle